

York County History: Essays and Memories

Published by the York County Historical Committee



York County History: Essays and Memories is a continuation of the research done by Dick Ivey in his original book of Fact Sheets. It provides additional information about York County's past that has been collected from various sources: historical research, oral histories, and personal memories. References are listed when known.

The York County Historical Committee is proud to share 400 years of rich history with members of our community. Additional input is welcome.

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African American History in York County and Virginia

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York County History: Essays and Memories

African American History The Colonial Period



Capture of Slaves - 1697

The First Africans in the New World

by Lois Winter

In the year 1619, the first representative assembly in the New World convened at Jamestown. A few weeks later in August, the first documented Negroes in Virginia were brought to Point Comfort, later the site of Fort Monroe. Captain John Smith, reported the following in his *Generall History of Virginia*. (1624)

"About the latter end of August, A Dutch man of Warr of the burden of 160 tons arrived at Point Comfort, the Commanders name was Capt. Jope. He brought not anything but 20 and odd Negars."



The Virginia Company of London had designed various plans to tempt emigrants to Virginia. The planters began importing white servants whose passage they paid, and who agreed, in return, to work for a given number of years --- usually 7 --- after which they gained their freedom. This plan was enacted into law by the Assembly of 1619, thus formalizing the indentured servant population.

The flow of Negroes into the colony was not significant at first, (only two during the next four years,) and they were treated much the same as white indentured servants. In a study commissioned by Colonial National Historical Park, researchers pinpointed the Jamestown properties of Sir George Yeardley and Captain William Pierce, two early colonists whose households included nine of the first documented Africans. Three black men and five black women are included among the 'servants' in a January 1625 census of Yeardley's household. The same records list an African servant woman named Angelo at Pierce's home.

Writing in the *William and Mary Quarterly* in 1998, historian John Thornton traced the captive passengers on the Portuguese vessel back to the West African kingdom of Ndongo, now known as Angola. Thornton's research portrays the first Africans as ethnically related to each other. They came from a coastal area that interacted with Europeans for nearly 150 years - and where Christianity was a well established tradition. Many of the blacks that followed were taken from the same region, and passed through the same slave fortress at Luanda after being captured by the Portuguese and their Imbangala allies.

Anthony Johnson, originally known as ‘Antonio, a Negro,’ arrived in Virginia as an indentured servant in 1621. Bound over as a servant to Isle of Wight County planter Edward Bennett, he eventually gained his freedom, married and acquired property - including a prosperous Eastern shore farm, slaves and indentured servants. His grandson named his own homestead “Angola.”

According to curator Dr. Thomas Davidson of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, “The first Africans came in such small numbers that they were not an entirely separate order of labor but rather a separate niche in a whole class of unfree labor that included both blacks and whites. Blacks certainly had less opportunity than whites, but there was wiggle room in the system. If you were smart and tough and enterprising, like Anthony Johnson, you could accomplish more in the early years of the colony than you could 50 years later.”

Most of the free African-Americans became free in the 17th and early 18th centuries before chattel slavery and racism fully developed in the United States. As indentured servants, they joined the same households as white servants - working, eating, sleeping, and running away together. Free African-Americans were beginning to be assimilated into colonial Virginia society. Many were the result of mixed race marriages.

The planters perhaps would have preferred to work their estates with white tenants as in England, but the labor intensive nature of tobacco made it virtually impossible to work large plantations profitably without slave labor. Slave ships were bringing Negroes from Africa in larger and larger numbers, despite the barbarities involved, and these enslaved people would furnish cheap labor as long as they lived and were able to work. Economic necessity created a demand that led to the thriving slave trade.



Capture of Slaves - 1687

Nearly 50 years after the census of 1625, the status of most newly arrived Africans had hardened drastically. As more and more slaves replaced white servants, the Legislature passed a series of laws which designated slavery as the appropriate condition for African Americans.

- In 1661 the Virginia General Assembly legalized Negro slavery.
- In 1670 the Virginia Assembly forbade free African Americans and Indians from owning white servants.
- In 1691 the Assembly prohibited the manumission of slaves unless they were transported out of the colony. It also prohibited interracial marriage and ordered the illegitimate, mixed-race children of white women bound out for 30 years.
- In 1705 the Assembly passed a law which all but eliminated the ability of slaves to earn their freedom by ordering that the farm stock of slaves be seized and sold by the churchwardens of the parish.

So quickly did attitudes change in the last 30 years of the 1600s, that the number of newly imported slaves pushed Virginia’s black population from less than 4 percent to double figures. By the end of the 17th century, all of the essential decisions about slavery had been made.

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Illustrations

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Capture of Slaves, and A Procession - engravings by Fortunato da Alemandini after a water color by Giovanni Cavazzi, 1687. Giovanni Cavazzi was a Catholic missionary who worked in West Central Africa during the mid 17th century. While in Africa he did several watercolors of the peoples of Kongo and Angola. Engravings were made from his paintings by Fortunato da Alemandini to illustrate a book Cavazzi wrote about Africa. This book was first published in 1687.

Colonial Records of Free Blacks in York County

The following profiles are presented using the spelling and wording directly from the censuses of 1790 and 1800 as compiled by historian Paul Heinegg. Free African and Native American households can be identified by their listing as 'taxable' or 'tithable.'

Despite the efforts of the Legislature, white servant women continued to bear children by African-American fathers well into the 18th century. Based on the census data, it appears that these women were the primary source in the increase in the free African American population and the source of those designated 'mulatto.'

These records provide descriptions of people whose life experiences in the early colonies were determined by their designation: slave, servant, or free.

Katherine Jewell, born about 1639, was the mother of a "Malato" boy William who was bound apprentice to William Boosh for thirty years in York County, Virginia on 6 March 1670. By the terms of the indenture Boosh was required to give William a heifer when he reached the age of fourteen. Fourteen years later on 24 March 1684/5 Boosh confirmed in York County Court that he had marked a heifer which William was to receive with its increase when he completed his indenture. Katherine may have married Stephen Pond, a white man. Sixty year old Katherine Pond and her thirty year old daughter Mary made depositions in York County on 14 December 1699 concerning Jane Merry's nuncupative will. Mary was probable identical to Mary Jewell, a "mollotto" whose fine for having an illegitimate child was paid by Stephen Pond on 24 May 1694.

William Catillah, born before 6 March 1670/1, sued his mistress, Mrs. Margaret Booth, for his freedom in York County Court on 6 April 1695, swearing that he was born of a free woman, was baptized Christian, and had served his mistress to the full age of twenty-four years. The 24 May 1695 session of the court ordered her to release him and pay him his freedom dues. He and his wife Ann registered the birth and baptism of their children in Charles Parish, York County. Ann may have been the Ann Cattilla whose death on 13 October 1729 was recorded in the Charles Parish Register. In December 1729 William was summoned to appear in York County Court to provide security for his daughter's fine for having an illegitimate child.

Matthew Cattiler, born 2 September 1697, and his wife Judith baptized their children in Charles Parish, York County. Judith died 10 December 1735. He had apparently married, second, Sarah, by 15 December 1740 when he was presented by the York County Court for not listing his "Mullatto: wife as a tithable. Perhaps Sarah's maiden name was Combs, since Sarah's daughter Martha lived in Thomas Combs' household in 1763. Matthew died 13 November 1748. In 1750 Sarah was presented by the York County Court for failing to list herself and Ann Berry, her future daughter-in-law, as tithables. Matthew and Judith had a son, Christopher, born at 1758, a soldier in the Revolution from York County, taxable in York County on one "white" tithe and a slave in 1784.

Abraham Cuttilo, born say 1760, was taxable in York County in 1784 and on himself and a horse in 1788. He married Mary Francis, 10 November 1787. In July 1791 they sold

16 acres in Elizabeth City County that Mary had inherited from her great-grandmother Hannah Francis. Abraham was head of a York County household of 6 "other free" in 1810. According to a 21 May 1838 report by Abraham Henry Buchanan, ages seventy-seven, of York County, Abraham Cottiler was a "free man of color" from York County in the Revolution in 1779 and served at the Battle of Yorktown. He died about 1808 leaving children: Nancy Cottiler, Betsy Cottiller, and John Cottiller.

John Hobson, born say 1761, was a soldier in the Revolution from York County and was taxable in York County in 1782. He and his wife, Mary, of Charles Parish, York County, were the parents of James, born 1 August 1783, baptized 14 September 1783. He registered as a "free Negro" in York County on 21 October 1805: *a bright Mulatto about 22 years of age 5 feet 7 3/4 Inches high, long curly black hair, Hazel eyes, thick Eye brows.* He was head of an Elizabeth City County household of 8 "other free" in 1810.

Thomas Epps Hobson, born about 1768, married Martha Hobson, 20 Decemeber 1799 York County bond. In 1802 he was listed as a ditcher in a list of "Free Negroes" living in Lunenburg County. On 19 September 1831 he was back in York County where he registered: *a bright mulatto about 63 years of age 5 feet 7 inches high, black straight hair, very little grey considering his age...a little freckled, his teeth decayed, he is very loquacious and fond of ardent liquors. Born free.*

Elizabeth Hopson, born about 1789, registered in York County on 21 September 1835: *a light mulatto about forty Six Years of age, five feet one & half Inches high, has long black hair, dark Eyes*

Descendants of Jacob Banks - August 1754 - January 5, 1835

- **Malachi**, born perhaps 1780, living in York County on 15 July 1833 when he and his wife, Judith, registered their daughter Lucy: *a small Girl about 10 years of age, a little cross Eyed...a wide gap between her Teeth (she and her Brother, now at the Breast, are children of Malachi & Judith Banks, free persons of colour*
- **Hannah**, born about 1804, registered in York onty on 19 September 1831, *a woman about 27 years old, 5 feet 5 3/4 inches high, quite black...broad face, high cheek bones*
- **Lavinia**, born about 1806, registered in York Count y on 16 January 1832: *a woman of tawny complexion, about 36 years of age, 5 feet 5 and a half, hgh cheek bones, sunken or hollow eyes, flat nose*
- **William**, born about 1807, registered in York County on 19 September 1831: *alias Stump, a dark fellow 5 feet 4 3/4 inches high twenty four years old, has...a stump toe. Born free*
- **Matilda**, born about 1815, registered in York County on 15 July 1833: *light complexion, about 18 years of age, 5 feet 5 1/4 Inches high, light yellow Eyes - high cheek bones...Has the scar of vaccination for Kine or smallpox on her left arm*

Sources

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Urban Slavery in 18th Century Yorktown

From Colonial National Park

Yorktown was Virginia's leading port for the importation of Africans during the 1740s, handling an average of 55.7 percent of the state's slave trade. By the 1750s, due to this influx and the high birth rate of native blacks, 50 percent of Virginia's and Yorktown's populations were black. Ninety percent of Virginia's slaves worked in their masters' tobacco and grain fields. The remaining 10 percent worked in the urban areas of Virginia's Tidewater region.

Arrival

Any slave, urban or rural, imported from Africa underwent the dehumanizing auction process held in ports like Yorktown. Blacks were purchased by slavers in Africa for £4 to £6, sold to Virginians for approximately £50 to £60 during the 1750s, and for as much as £100 by 1775. Virginians lacked currency to purchase slaves, relying instead on credit extended to them by the slavers. Local merchants like the Nelsons were recruited by slavers to conduct the credit transactions, receiving a commission of about eight percent. By 1755, however, the slave trade had slowed, and only eight percent of the adult black population in York County had arrived from Africa since 1750. The majority of Yorktown's imported slaves came from African communities located in the present day countries of Nigeria and Angola. It took about two years for newly arrived Africans to learn English, whereas, native born blacks spoke English fluently.

Work Roles

Approximately 75 percent of urban slaves were "household" servants, performing jobs such as cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning house, spinning, sewing, baking, waiting tables, gardening, caring for livestock, butchering, and acting as coachmen and manservants. Ironically, there are no sources documenting the use of women slaves as personal maids to the mistresses of the houses. The typical number of household servants at the home of a prominent citizen was probably between 10 and 20. Governor Fauquier had a staff of only 17 slaves for the Governor's Palace. It is possible that 80 percent of the white families in Yorktown prior to 1776 owned slaves, averaging four to five per family. It is erroneous to think of Virginians as owning hundreds of slaves; only 12 had 300 or more. In 1787 Thomas Nelson, Jr., owned 384, only 50 of whom resided in York County on his 810 acres and 10 town lots.

The enslaved people who did not work in their masters' homes performed semi-skilled or skilled professions in town. They were carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, cabinetmakers, joiners, coopers, harness makers, tanners, tailors, river pilots and dock hands. Because Yorktown was a port, many of the jobs performed by slaves dealt directly with the shipping trade, whether it be the repairing of ships, loading and unloading of cargo, acting as pilots to help navigate ships on the York River or, perhaps, assisting in the taverns to prepare meals for the large population of transient sailors. The *Virginia Gazette* lists over 50 different types of occupations performed by urban slaves.

Appearance

Due to the type of labor in Yorktown, most slaves were males. The average height of an adult black male was approximately five feet, six inches. The clothing and appearance of urban slaves were as varied as the type and color of the clothes they wore. Many slaves possessed only one suit of clothes made of coarse and cheap materials. Domestic slaves, however, probably wore better types of clothing. They were highly visible to the white community, and it was important for a master to maintain his reputation and social standing by exhibiting his wealth, whether it was shown by the clothing worn by his slaves or by the furniture in his home.

Social Interactions and Religion

Most urban slaves lived in outbuildings near their masters' homes or resided in the homes, sleeping on staircases or open floor spaces. These "homebound" servants were on call 24 hours a day, versus slaves who lived and worked outside the constant view of their masters. Religion played a major role in the daily lives of slaves. Many relied heavily on their faith to someday bring them freedom. Because some masters feared their slaves would equate Christianity with freedom, they refused to baptize their slaves. Nonetheless, some were baptized and allowed to attend church segregated from the white congregation. Marriages among the enslaved were not recognized in any religious or legal form, but fostered in the hopes of preventing runaways and slave copulation.

Laws and Punishments

"Black Codes" were enacted to control conduct. The first "Black Code" was passed in 1680, and it prohibited a slave from leaving the master's property without permission, striking a white person, and hiding or resisting capture after running away. Slaves also were governed by the same laws as whites, except for the stealing of pigs and the administering of any medicine without the express permission of the master. Apparently pig stealing was very popular, and the third conviction for this crime was to result in the death penalty. Also, whites feared that some slaves were using witchcraft with their medicines and might attempt to poison their masters. One slave was burned at the stake because her master died after receiving her medicinal concoction.

Any capital offense committed by a slave generally was dealt with speedily. The slave was immediately imprisoned, arraigned by a court of oyer and terminer, and tried and sentenced without a jury. Punishment was usually hanging, and in some cases a hanged slave's head was cut off and placed on public display for all to see.

For slaves who habitually ran away or resisted capture, death was their punishment. The death of a slave was an economic loss to the master, and a law was passed which allowed masters to seek reimbursement from the General Assembly in the case of a punishment death. Minor offenses could be punished with whippings and/or mutilations, or dismemberments of certain body parts. For example, a slave was once found guilty of giving false evidence, and so was whipped and had his ears nailed to the pillory for half an hour, after which time his ears were cut off one at a time. Or a runaway slave could have a foot cut off to put an end to his noncompliance with the law.

Running Away

The greatest fear of whites was a slave insurrection. However, from 1619 to 1865 there were only 72 recorded episodes of uprisings or attempted uprisings in Virginia, with just nine of those occurring before 1776. Slaves, nonetheless, found ways to resist their bondage through sabotage or by running away. Many runaways went to urban areas because they could hide more easily or could pose as a freeman and find work as a craftsman.

All slave owners suffered the loss of runaway slaves, especially during the Revolutionary War. Thomas Jefferson estimated that in 1778 alone as many as 30,000 slaves ran away to find freedom behind British lines. Prior to the Siege of Yorktown, a large number of runaway slaves had joined Cornwallis's forces.

Freedom was difficult to achieve for slaves who lived in Yorktown or anywhere else in Virginia. There were only three legal criteria which could release black persons from slavery: first, if their mother was free when they were born they were considered free; second, if they were set free by their master, provided he transported them out of the colony; and third, if they performed some heroic act whereby the General Assembly voted to set them free. Unfortunately, the Revolution did not change this, even though men like Thomas Jefferson sought more liberal terms for slaves. Enslaved African-Americans continued to live and work in Yorktown until the Civil War. Their contribution to the history of Yorktown cannot be overstated.

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African Bella: An Anecdote from "Sketches of Old Virginia Family Servants"

by Anne Rose Page, 1847

One York County story described in "Sketches of Old Virginia Family Servants", authored by Anna Rose Page with a preface by Episcopal Bishop William Meade, is the tale of an enslaved girl rescued by Secretary Thomas Nelson.

The family story recounts the slave ship arriving at the port of York and the female slave appealing to Thomas Nelson, Secretary of the Governor's Council, who 'adopted' and fed and clothed the slave who became known as African Bella. Baptized at Grace Church, the account records her conversion to Christianity and her popularity with the Nelson family and others. Bella apparently had tattoos on her face. She recounted that she had been a King's daughter in an African country and had been sold into slavery. Bella served as a faithful servant to the Nelsons and was taught lessons in Christianity by Mrs. Nelson. The sketch records that Bella lived to a ripe old age, 'respected and beloved by all' and was buried in the 'colored burying ground' in the northern end of Yorktown.

Baby Heustis Cook and Nurse
March 1871



Valentine Richmond History Center

Register of Free Negroes – 1798-1805

The microfilm collection in the Colonial National Historic Park Library contains some extensive lists within York County Guardian's Accounts (1798-1867) which detail expenses of orphans from the mid-18th to mid 19th centuries. Among the accounts were listed the names and personal and physical descriptions of Negroes living in York County. Evidently, Negroes, either free by birth or free by emancipation, were required to register in the county of their residence for their own protection. Accordingly, the descriptions detail scars, marks, height, and various other unique aspects of appearance which would prove their identity to anyone who presumed to question their right to be free.

We know so little of people's appearance from the past, aside from portraits. But here, contained on the spare pages of an account book, are the most thorough and exacting physical reconstructions of the free Negro population in York County in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It must be borne firmly in mind that these descriptions are written through the eyes of a white male. Many of the judgments made of the appearance are relative to his perception of what is the norm. Nevertheless, these profiles provide physical descriptions of the free black population in Yorktown.

Laurie Pearce, 2/6/92

York County, VA - Registers - Guardian's Accounts/York County VA-History/York County, (1798-1867)VA , Colonial National Historic Park Library

REGISTER OF FREE NEGROES

1. Mary DeRozario a short Black negro aged about 30 years with a Pleasant Countenance when Spoken To Registered at my office this 26th day of April 1798
2. Wm Walden 22 yrs old 5 feet 6 1/2 Inches high, good Countenance, speaks low and slow, a mall Scar over each eye and 1 under his left ear regd 25th Jul 1798
3. Jack Allen 21 yrs of age 5 feet 3 inches high good countenance, small Legs, long visage 3 sats on his breast & 1 on his right shin regd Same day
4. James Williams of York County 22 yrs of age 5 feet 4 1/2 Inches high, yellow complexion his right leg more crooked than the left Regd 5th Octo: 1798.
5. Alice, a negro emancipated by John Moss of York County by Deed recorded 5 feet 2 Inches high, a little pock freckled, yellowish complexion some of her upper foreteeth out smiles when spoken to 24:th Dec 1798
6. Israel Alvis, Junr 5 Feet 6 1/2 Inches high twenty three years of age dark Complexion with a flat nose wide mouth and a voice inclined to be hoarse registered at my office this 7th day of Feby 1799.
7. Patty Allen, a dark mulatto of serious countenance 5 feet 1 Inches speaks low with a sar on the Joint of her right thumb. 30 years of age 2 small scars on her right cheek regd 30:th April 1799.

8. Francis Scott of very black complexion 5 feet 3 Inches & 1/2 high square shoulders short woolly hair & about 24 years of age regd 23d July 1799.
9. Rachel Negro Woman liberated by Ann Ellis's Will about 30 Years of Age 5 feet 7 1/2 Inches high long visage, scar over her left Eye, very black, assumed the named of Roberts.
10. Mary Spruce about 5 feet high, aged 28 years or thereabouts, of round youthful visage, dark olive complexion, nearly black, daughter of one Betty Limas a free woman registered the 22d of August 1800.
11. Mary Flowers 5 feet 5 Inches high aged 68 years almost black with a large flat nose & a scar oer her left eye born free of free parents in the Parish of Bruton & County of York registered this 25th of September 1800.
12. Elizabeth Armfield 5 feet 6 Inches high aged 66 years a bright Mulatto long grey hair born of free parents in the Parish of Bruton & County of York registered this 25th September 1800
13. Molly Murray a dark Mulatto 4 feet 10 Inches high 44 Years of Age talks slow and lisps very much was born in the Parish of York Hampton in the Town and County of York
14. Nansy Roberts a bright Mulatto with short woolly hair & a scar near the left corner of her mouth 5 feet 4 1/2 Inches high aged about 36 yrs born of free parents in the Parish of Bruton & County of York 17:th June 1801
15. Edwrd Taylor a very black fellow with short woolly hair, his nose rather higher than is common to Negroes 5 feet 6 Inches High and has a round scar near the Joint of his left shoulder and rather an effeminate voice regd 17:th July 1801
16. Robt Gillen aged about 42 of yellowish complexion 5 feet 8 Inches high, has many Scars on his forehead a black spot on the lower right side of his Tongue and lost many foreteeth from his lower Jaw. His is illy made abt the knees & shoulders...has weak Eyes and much attached to fiddling and drinking 7:th Sept 1801
17. Minannie short thick negro woman about 25 of 30 years of age 5 feet high with flat nose thick lips her upper lip is perforated with some Instrument both Ears bored & speaks bad English imported into this state by Mons Olivier about the year 1793 registered 24th Oct 1801

by Lois Winter

In April 1775, the rumblings of war were stirring in Williamsburg, Virginia. Amidst a local dispute about security of ammunition, the Royal Governor of the Virginia colony, Lord Dunmore, confided to a palace guest that if the townspeople should revolt, he would "declare Freedom to the slaves and reduce the City of Williamsburg to ashes." Many Virginians feared the slaves would be freed and go to Dunmore's side.

Dunmore became more unpopular over the next several months. On June 8 he decided that he could not remain in the capital, and fled the palace with his wife and children aboard the *Fowey*. He never returned to Williamsburg.

Dunmore eyed Norfolk, at the time one of the largest cities in America, as a safe harbor. Encouraged by the soldiering capabilities of the slaves who had come to him unsolicited, he tried to open the floodgates. He composed a document he called a "most disagreeable but absolutely necessary step." He declared martial law and ordered Virginians to pledge allegiance to the Crown or be considered traitors. Then he delivered an edict that, while limited, freed slaves belonging to rebels who were willing to fight with him. It was, in effect, the first emancipation proclamation in America, nearly a century before Abraham Lincoln issued his broader edict:

"I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort to His Majesty's Standard, or be looked upon as Traitors to His Majesty's Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offenses; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands....And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops as soon as may be."

Dunmore released the document on November 14, 1775. The phrase "appertaining to rebels" is crucial because only the slaves of Patriots were offered their freedom. The slaves of Tories would remain on their plantations or be sent back to their owners.

Within a week 500 slaves had answered Dunmore's call. By the first of December nearly 300 blacks in uniform, with the words "Liberty to Slaves" inscribed across their breasts, were members of "Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment." On December 9, 1775 at the Battle of Great Bridge, the British force of 600, some of whom were black, was thrown back by Patriots. Dunmore then retreated to his ships with his troops and continued to train black soldiers in the use of small arms. In March 1776, Dunmore sailed with his force, including the Ethiopian Regiment, to Gwynn's Island at the mouth of the Piankatank River, about 30 miles north of Norfolk, and dug into a defensive position.

The British had hoped to triumph with its Ethiopian Regiment, commanded by Thomas Byrd, but it was being decimated by disease. Dunmore wrote to Lord Germain that illnesses had killed "an incredible Number of our People, especially the Blacks. If it were not for this horrid disorder, I am satisfied I should have had two thousand Blacks, with whom I should have had no doubt of penetrating into the heart of the Colony." He eventually separated the sick from the well, putting them at opposite sides of Gwynn's Island.

Dunmore and his straggling crew were forced off of Gwynn's Island by Virginia's military on July 18, 1776. One of the last to leave was Captain Byrd. He was "huddled into a cart, in a very sick and low condition," it is said, and carried down "to one of the last

vessels to depart." Dunmore had relied upon Byrd to build up his army with runaway slaves. When Byrd left, much of his regiment was dead or dying.

When Virginia troops boarded their small craft and landed on the island, they found an appalling sight. Some thirty members of the Ethiopian Regiment, seriously ill from small pox or other diseases, had been left behind. Many others had died during the weeks that Dunmore had occupied the island. One officer counted at least 130 graves, some of which contained more than one body. "It is supposed they buried 500 Negroes on the island," an officer wrote in his journal, which was published in the *Virginia Gazette* shortly after Dunmore fled.

While the British were enticing slaves to rebel against their masters, only a small number of blacks served on the side of the revolutionaries in Virginia. By one estimate, about half of the 1000 free blacks in Virginia during the Revolutionary War went into military service, along with perhaps 100 slaves, most of whom served as substitutes for their masters. Free blacks could be armed, but Virginia law forbade the arming of slaves, although this restriction was sometimes overlooked.

Former slaves were placed in a difficult position, working for the British or serving French troops, while being hunted to be returned to their masters. An account from Captain Johann Ewald, Hessian Jager Corps, October 14, 1781 describes the situation during the Siege of Yorktown:

"I would just as soon forget to record a cruel happening. On the same day of the enemy assault, we drove back to the enemy all of our black friends, whom we had taken along to despoil the countryside. We had used them to good advantage and set them free, and now, with fear and trembling, they had to face the reward of their cruel masters. Last night I had to make a sneak patrol, during which I came across a great number of these unfortunates. In their hunger, these unhappy people would have soon devoured what I had; and since they lay between two fires, they had to be driven on by force. This harsh act had to be carried out, however, because of the scarcity of provisions; but we should have thought more about their deliverance at this time."

After Yorktown, the chief concern of Americans about blacks was their disappearance. Americans could not prevent mass exodus of their slaves, which began immediately after Cornwallis's defeat. Whenever the defeated British made their final withdrawals, whether by land or sea, thousands of slaves went with them. General Washington supported the effort to keep Negroes from leaving the state. He was disturbed about the number of slaves who attached themselves to the British or posed as freemen in order to deceive American commanders. On October 25, 1781, Washington ordered officers of the allied armies to deliver all Negroes who came into their hands to a guard to be established at Yorktown and Gloucester.

The Articles of Capitulation at Yorktown stated that any American property held by the British garrison was subject to recovery. The articles did not address slaves who would try to escape by going aboard the departing warships of the Royal Navy. The day after the surrender, Governor Thomas Nelson Jr. wrote to Cornwallis asking him to prevent Negroes

from making their escape aboard the sloop of war, *Bonetta*, which was allowed to sail to New York with news of the capitulation.

However, in October 1783, Governor Nelson recognized the contribution made by slaves who fought in the Revolution and issued an act directing the emancipation of certain slaves who had served as soldiers in the state.

"All persons who have faithfully served agreeable to the terms of their enlistment, and have thereby contributed toward the establishment of American liberty and independence, should enjoy the blessings of freedom as a reward for their toils and labors; Be it therefore enacted, That each and every slave, who by the appointment and direction of his owner, hath enlisted in any regiment or corps raised within this state, and hath been received as a substitutes for any free person whose duty or lot it was to serve in such regiment or corps,shall from the passing of this act, be fully and compleatly emancipated, and shall be held and deemed free in as full and ample a manner as if each and every of them were specially named in the act."

The most famous black to serve in Virginia during the revolution was James Armistead, who was employed as a spy by the Marquis de Lafayette, a French Officer in the American Continental Army. At great personal risk, Armistead fled to the British force of Lord Cornwallis, saying that he had escaped his master, and brought back vital intelligence to Lafayette. For his service, Armistead was emancipated by the Virginia Legislature, but it took nearly forty years for him to receive a pension.

After the Revolution, many of the gentry who had held high positions in Virginia before the Revolution remained in power. With the British emancipation of the slaves voided, slavery became even more entrenched as a key part of the state's economy.

Sources

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James Armistead – 1760 - 1830

JAMES ARMISTEAD LAFAYETTE

An act to emancipate James, a negro slave, the property of William Armistead, gentleman.

I. WHEREAS, it is represented that James, a negro slave, the property o William Armistead, gentleman, of the county of New Kent, did, with the permission of this master, in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty-one, enter into the service of the Marquis la Fayette, and at the peril of his life found means to frequent the British, and thereby faithfully executed important commissions entrusted to him by the marquis; and the said James hath made application to this assembly to set him free, and to make his said matter adequate compensation for his value, which is judged reasonable and right to do.

II. *Be it therefore enacted*, That the said James shall, from and after the passing of this act, enjoy as full freedom as if he had been born free, any law to the contrary thereof, notwithstanding.

III. *And be it further enacted*, That the executive shall, as soon as may be, appoint a proper person, and the said William Armistead another, who shall ascertain and fix the value of the said James, and to certify such valuation to the auditor of accounts, who shall issue his warrant to the treasurer for the same, to be paid out of the general fund.

HENNINGS VIRGINIA STATUTES 1786



James Armistead [Lafayette] was an African American spy during the American Revolution. Born in Virginia as a slave to William Armistead in 1760, he volunteered to join the army in 1781. After gaining the consent of his owner, Armistead was stationed to serve under the Marquis de Lafayette, the commander of French forces allied with the American Continental Army. While working for Lafayette, he successfully infiltrated British General Charles Cornwallis's headquarters posing as a runaway slave hired by the British to spy on the Americans. The intelligence reports from his espionage were instrumental in helping to defeat the British during the Battle of Yorktown.

Blacks at the Battle of Yorktown

by Robert O. Bigelow

While doing research in the National Park Service records, trying to identify a cemetery or burial place of British soldiers who died at Yorktown in 1781, I encountered a little-known tragic episode in the Siege of Yorktown: more blacks may have died than the total losses of the American, French and British armies.

Lord Cornwallis had been involved in a number of battles in the southern campaign before arriving in Yorktown. While achieving some military successes, he had little luck in organizing Tory followers. However, as the British army passed through the Carolina countryside, slaves, desperate for freedom from their terrible existence, escaped and sought refuge with the army. Whether Cornwallis and his officers were altruistic in their motives or not, they encouraged the action by providing subsistence and a safe haven. Also, they promised freedom "as soon as the rebels are crushed."

By April 1781, convinced that he must take Virginia, Cornwallis left Wilmington, N.C., and resumed his march north to the excellent seaport of Yorktown. There he awaited reinforcement by the British navy.

In 1781, the American Army Quartermaster General, Colonel Timothy Pickering of Massachusetts, estimated there were 2,000 blacks with the British Army at Yorktown. Whether the original British purpose or not, the able-bodied were formed into work units with titles such as "Black Pioneers" and put to work constructing defensive fortifications.

While the American and French armies established siege lines around the British, a French fleet under Comte de Grasse blocked the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay. The siege noose tightened; Cornwallis was trapped.

Throughout September and early October 1781, rations were reduced as commissary supplies dwindled. An attempt to flee to Gloucester failed, livestock were ordered destroyed, and the freedom-seeking blacks became a starved and diseased liability. Though these "pioneers" had labored hard to build the considerable fortifications (some of which still exist), Cornwallis had them driven from his lines into the no-man's land between the armies.

Captain Ewald of the British Jagers bemoaned the cruelty of the act when he recounted that "in the Sept. 28th assault, we drove back to the enemy our black friends. We had used them to good advantage and set them free, and now with fear and trembling, they had to face the reward of their cruel masters."

Some idea of Ewald's prophesy showed up almost immediately as General Washington learned that some of his officers were busily acquiring these unfortunates as personal property. Washington immediately forbade the practice, and when the battle ended he ordered that they be collected and accounted for. Before he left Yorktown, he attempted to settle the disposition of the surviving blacks.

Those who could prove they were freemen were freed; others were taken to redoubts and put under guard. They were then sent to nearby plantations where they were held while advertisements were placed in newspapers for previous owners to reclaim them. Some were able to hide, survive and escape into the countryside. A Virginia doctor

reported that many who attempted to hide in the woods about Yorktown fell ill and "died by the scores."

A French nobleman was more specific in declaring that "about 1,000 Negroes and Negresses of all ages died from want."

History books declare the British the losers of the Battle of Yorktown. True. They lost their colonies and 300 or more of their soldiers. The rest of the army lost "face," laid down muskets and eventually went home. But what of the blacks who, in their futile hope for freedom, lost their health, their families and their lives? Theirs was a terrible loss, but perhaps a worse fate befell many who survived the privation and din of battle: they were returned to servitude.

Whereas the military deaths in the siege are listed as British 156, French 52, and Americans 21, for total of 229, even with the addition of 515 wounded that number was almost certainly exceeded by the black casualties.

Although not of significant consequence in the recording of the victory at Yorktown, this tragedy deserves a place in the annals of black history. Here on the Peninsula it could have a more personal meaning as some of our present day citizens find and remember their roots.

Source: The Daily Press, February 23, 1997

York County History: Essays and Memories

African-American History The Civil War Era



Contrabands with Union Soldiers - 1862

The Slave Trade and the Wilberforce Influence in Yorktown, Virginia

by Reinhold Beuer-Tajovsky



William Wilberforce 1759- 1833

"By adopting the institution of slavery, society devised a new form of holding wealth. A slave could be held as an asset in the portfolio of an investor; from the investor's viewpoint, slave labor could be treated like capital, whereas free labor cannot be treated in this way."

Barbara L. Solow

More than two hundred years ago, on the 25th of March, 1807, the British Parliament passed the Trans-Atlantic Slave Act, outlawing that inhumane practice forever. The American President at that time, Thomas Jefferson, signed similar legislation effective in January 1808. Thus ended the intense 20 year struggle between Member of Parliament William Wilberforce, the English abolitionist, and the ruling capitalist entrepreneurs of Britain who had been shipping thousands of enchaineds Africans to America yearly.

The Spanish and Portuguese had engaged in this commerce of living human flesh for several centuries, followed by the French, Dutch, Italians and Americans spurned on by a need for free, cheap laborers in burgeoning sugar and tobacco growing regions. Some of the more notorious capitalists, entrepreneurs and slave merchants were Henry the Navigator, Ferdinand of Castile, King Louis the XIV of France, the Queen Mother of Spain Maria Christina, the Governor of the Bank of England Humphrey Morice, New Yorker and signer of the U.S. Declaration of Independence Philip Livingston, Bostonian Colonel Handasys Perkins, and Henry Laurens of South Carolina. Last but certainly not the least of these robber barons was the English King Charles II (the former Duke of York after whom the river and the port town was named). Not to be forgotten is one of the earliest mercenaries to carry slaves to Virginia, Sir. Robert Rich.

The British slave export reached its peak between 1761 and 1780. Although the slave trade was abolished officially in 1807, it was carried on illegally for almost forty

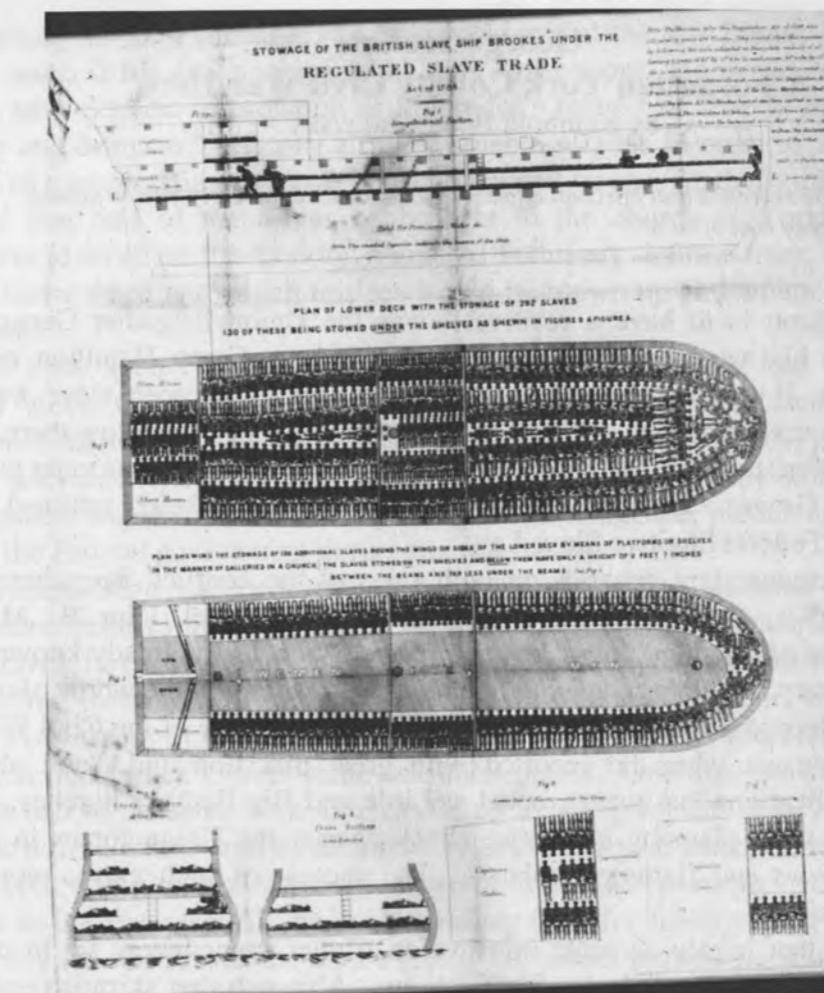
years longer with the slave ship "*The Wanderer*" bringing its last load of slaves to America in 1859.

Yorktown was established in 1691 to insure the collection of customs owed to the Crown. It was designated the official port of entry in 1706. Yorktown was the colony's major slave port bringing in 17% to 81% of all African slaves during the period 1710 to 1733, and 53% in the 1740s during the heyday of the tobacco trade. During that time, buyers had to row out to the anchored ships to inspect their 'goods' and purchase their human cargo. Many of those enslaved souls ended up on York County plantations, while others were ferried over the river to Gloucester and could be marched as far north as Rappahannock.

In his 20 year struggle to abolish the trans-Atlantic slavery, Parliamentarian Wilberforce had been profoundly moved by the story told in the 1772 hymn "Amazing Grace", which was composed by Captain John Newton. The song recalls how Newton, in preparation for a sermon, read I Chronicles 17:16 and was awakened to the horrors of his past deeds as a slave mercenary.

In 1858, President Lincoln decreed that the deeds of William Wilberforce be made known to "every school boy." Thus the Wilberforce influence continued to grow in America throughout the 19th century. When Wilberforce died in 1833, free blacks throughout America were urged to wear black arm bands for 30 days as a sign of mourning. Several years later the first black college in the United States changed its official name to "Wilberforce University" in his honor.

In addition to ending the slave trade, the Wilberforce influence reached into Yorktown in another unique way. In 1863 the newly commissioned Chaplain William H. Hunter, the first African-American chaplain, was assigned to the 4th United States Colored Troop Regiment stationed at Yorktown. Reverend Hunter had recently received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Wilberforce University in Ohio.



"Stowage of the British Slave Ship 'Brookes' under the Regulated Slave Trade, Act of 1788"; shows each deck and cross-sections of decks and "tight packing" of captives. One of the most famous images of the transatlantic slave trade. After the 1788 Regulation Act, the Brookes (also spelled Brooks) was allowed to carry 454 slaves, the approximate number shown in this illustration. However, in four earlier voyages (1781-86), she carried from 609 to 740 slaves so crowding was much worse than shown here; for example, in her 1782 voyage with 609 enslaved Africans, there were 351 men, 127 women, 90 boys, and 41 girls crammed into its decks (thanks to David Eltis for this information). The illustration shown here also appears in Carl B. Wadstrom (An Essay on Colonization, particularly applied to the Western coast of Africa... in Two Parts [London, 1794, 1795], as a fold-out in the pocket attached to cover.

Source

Broadside collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (Portfolio 282-43 [Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-44000]; also, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library and Library Company of Philadelphia).

[http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slave
Trade/collection/large/E014.JPG](http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/collection/large/E014.JPG)

**George Scott:
A Forgotten York County Civil War Hero**

by Reinhold Beuer-Tajovsky

"It is to be regretted that effectual efforts were not made at an early date to furnish a history of men of color."

----William Yates, 1838

"George Scott is to have a revolver," was the Union Brigadier General E.W. Pierce's order to his astounded staff on June 9, 1861, at Camp Hamilton near Fort Monroe, Virginia. It was unheard of in those days that an escaped slave was to be provided a gun or revolver when the Law of Possession did not even allow them to carry a stick for self-defense. Scott had escaped two years earlier from a Yorktown plantation owned by a Mr. Graves. Escaped slaves were still subject to being returned to their owners under the Federal Fugitive Slave Law.

But the commanding generals on both sides of the conflict, Brigadier General Benjamin F. Butler, United States of America, and Colonel John B. Magruder, Confederate States of America, knew better. To them Scott was already known for the considerable military intelligence information he had provided. In the words of one Civil War historian, "George Scott set in motion the first pitched battle of the Civil War..." on the Virginia Peninsula when he reported with great precision and detail about the Confederate fortifications that were erected at Little and Big Bethel Churches, and that the Confederates were planning a surprise attack against the Union forces in order to seize Newport News and Hampton villages. The success of such moves would have isolated Fort Monroe.

Based on that highly accurate information, Butler immediately set in motion a plan to attack those two Confederate fortifications. Although that skirmish ended in a Union failure, it did signal to Magruder the need to retreat from those advance positions.

In any newly activated theater of operations, accurate intelligence of the opposition's activities, strengths, weaknesses, fortifications, plans and so forth are of paramount importance. Such was the case, for instance, when Magruder planned to attack General Pierce's forces at Newport News with a small cavalry unit and troops. Not knowing about the overwhelming force confronting him, he would have been soundly defeated. Fortunately for him, he was forced to alter his plans at the last moment when he was informed that one of his Regiments was not prepared for battle because of a lack of shoes and other equipment.

An endless array of books and articles has been published about the brilliant operations and actions that occurred during the Civil War. But ultimately it was the quality of the military intelligence that commanders received that led to their successes or failures. After-action reports are replete with such stories. Since many residents fled the advancing Federal troops and the location of the Confederate lines made it difficult for fugitives from neighboring counties to reach the Hampton village, Scott's efforts in providing up-to-date military intelligence became vital.

Because Scott had developed a considerable reputation in the several counties and cities on the Peninsula (even bounty hunters were reluctant to pursue him), it was easier for him to move about the population behind enemy lines. During his years of hiding from being recaptured by Graves, he came to know many people and became expert in

the geography of the Peninsula. This knowledge and the any friends he made became valuable assets in his new position as a Union Army scout. He would come to know, for instance, such detailed information as Magruder's request of several county magistrates to collect and bring to Yorktown all the available wagons in order to alleviate an acute shortage of transportation to move his supplies and troops. At the same time, Magruder requested that half of the slaves be brought to the church at Yorktown for further distribution to work on the Yorktown and Williamsburg defense lines. Scott would also come to know when and which bridges would be blown up and which roads were to be barricaded.

In time, many other 'contrabands' (escaped slaves that had been considered 'property' under Confederate state laws and were declared confiscated war property to keep them from having to be returned to their owners by Union forces) joined Scott in his scouting activities. The historian Herbert Apthaker summed up the situation as follows: "...the greatest single source of military and naval intelligence, particularly in the tactical level for the Federal government during the war, was the Negro."

George Scott had been traveling the "Underground Railroad" to freedom for several years prior to the war. Since he was being relentlessly pursued by his former owner Graves, he came to know where most of the safe roads and 'safe houses' were, and where to find shelter and food. Other plantation owners and farmers who did not agree with the viciousness of Grave's treatment of his slaves offered him hiding places. They would alert Scott when Graves came near their places. One time the alert came too late and Scott had to do battle with Graves. Being a very powerful man, Scott was able to overcome him and disarm him by taking away Grave's Bowie knife and revolver.

Scott was also known to be swift of foot. One morning while being served breakfast in the Hampton jail, he made a daring dash for freedom past a stunned guard, leaving only his shirt tail in the man's grasp. To sustain himself he worked at many odd jobs, as well as lived off the bounty of the land and the rivers.

A month after the Battle of Big Bethel, the following "Accords from Washington" appeared in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* of July 23, 1861:

"Massachusetts Troops Coming Home --- Baltimore newspapers of recent date furnish the subjoined news from Fortress Monroe...The Third and Fourth Regiments left for Boston. General Pierce, who commanded at Big Bethel, returns with them. They were reviewed by General Benjamin F. Butler. General Pierce retired from the Massachusetts Regiments."

As a final act of recognition and esteem for his crucial and heroic service, the General gave George Scott his long sought freedom and the opportunity to once again join the ranks of the society of human beings by letting him join his regiment on the return trip to Boston.



General Benjamin Butler and the Contrabands – May 1861

Contraband Slaves Flock to Yorktown

by Mark St. John Erickson

When the Union army marched into Yorktown on May 4, 1862, the battered old waterfront village was virtually deserted. After a month-long siege, one white woman and two blacks were the only inhabitants the hastily retreating Confederates left behind by to greet the stunned troops of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan.

Still, it didn't take long for the first fugitive slave to come and ask for asylum inside the ramparts where American colonists had won the Revolution. By mid-1863, that slave had been followed by more than 12,000 others. "Colored people for miles around flocked to Yorktown as soon as (it was) occupied by our troops ... The old and young, male and female, came in, bringing all their earthly possessions," wrote Lt. Eugene Nash of the 44th New York. "They were extremely happy and hopeful ... They sang, they danced, they prayed ... The dawn of a new life had come. No person who witnessed that scene can forget it."

Few observers would forget the chaos that followed their arrival, either.

'Disgusting' conditions

The Union army was quick to give sanctuary to its enemy's labor force. Still, harried Yorktown commander Erasmus Keyes found himself grappling with how to shelter and feed the horde that came in "mostly without shoes, sufficient clothing, blankets" — nearly a year after Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's landmark decision to harbor the first fugitive slaves at Fort Monroe.

Within weeks, Keyes was drawing upon military stores, issuing increasingly large amounts of corn meal, shoes and clothing to the refugees. He also began organizing labor details that employed the so-called "contraband slaves" — who were not considered free — to rebuild the fortifications.

By the time Brig. Gen. Isaac Wistar arrived in June 1863, however, the endless tide of slaves had spawned "the most disgusting" conditions he had "ever seen in a military post." "The fortifications enclosed perhaps a couple of hundred acres, inside of which — besides the dirty, idle and neglected troops — were gathered over 12,000 refugee Negroes supported in idleness on government rations, and lying about without any order under any ragged shelter they could get, in every stage of filth, poverty disease and death," Wister reported. "The roadways, parade ground, gun platforms, and even the ditches and epaulements were encumbered by these poor wretches."

So appalled was Wistar by what he found that he refused to post his men within the earthworks. And when he took command in mid-July he quickly "put a large force at work laying out and erecting Negro quarters three fourths of a mile outside the fort."

'Nice, neat, tidy' Slabtown

That led to two sprawling contraband communities, including "Slabtown" located near Yorktown and "Acretown" in what is now Lackey. A third settlement rose outside Union lines at Gloucester Point.

"These weren't haphazard communities. They were well-organized and well-built," says Colonial National Historical Park historian Diane K. Depew, describing "nice, neat, tidy" neighborhoods of 400 and 500 cabins. "If you walk down past the National Cemetery on the battlefield, you can still find some of the streets of Slabtown."

By December 1863, Quaker missionaries were operating a school and store. They also were gathering seed and farming supplies to enable the contrabands to cultivate garden plots of 1/2 acre and more. So strong did these settlements become that nearly 150 years later Lackey still survives outside the gates of Yorktown Naval Weapons Station. Slabtown remained intact until the 1970s, when the Park Service purchased the property and demolished the houses to restore the landscape of the historic 1781 battlefield.

Despite that loss, two Slabtown graveyards can still be seen near the National Cemetery. Historic Shiloh Baptist Church — which moved a half-mile away — still boasts an active congregation.

"They haven't forgotten where they came from," Depew says. "They still have records that go back to 1863."

Mark St John Erickson, September 25, 2011

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Library of Congress

A "contraband" slave and a Union soldier in southeastern Virginia, 1862.



Escaping Contraband Slaves

Source Edwin Forbes, *Life Studies of the Great Army*. A historical work of art, in copper-plate etching . . . illustrating the life of the Union Armies during the years 1862-'3-'4'-5 (New York, E. Forbes, 1876), plate 30 (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library)

Comments Captioned "Coming into the Lines," shows a wagon containing what may be a family escaping to the Union lines during the Civil War. Such fugitive slaves were called contrabands. A barefoot man, carrying a banjo, leads the animals drawing the wagon, and a teenage (?) boy with what appears to be an unusual hat sits atop one of the animals; two white Union soldiers on the left. This engraving, based on a sketch by Forbes (which differs slightly from the published engraving), first appeared in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (vol. 18 [1864], p. 340); see Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZ62-88806).



Contrabands at Allen's Farm

Thousands of fugitive slaves fled to the Union lines at Yorktown after the Confederate retreat in May 1862. This is one of three archival pictures from Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's campaign showing the slaves encountered at Allen's Farm in York County. The sprawling Union encampment can be seen in the background.



Contrabands at a York County Farm

Thousands of fugitive slaves fled to the Union lines at Yorktown after the Confederate retreat in May 1862. This is one of three archival pictures from Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's campaign showing the slaves encountered at Allen's Farm in York County.

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress / September 23, 2011)

Slabtown

by Robert O. Bigelow

Slabtown was a legacy of slavery, but more important than that, for thousands in the midst of the Civil War it was a stepping stone on the path to emancipation.

On June 1863, when Union General Isaac Wistar took command of Fort community of wooden huts for the thousands of ex-slaves who had converged on Yorktown. His motive may have been expediency to clear the port facilities, but the town built with slabs of wood on the old Revolutionary War battlefield became a home and community that endured, to a degree, almost a hundred years.

Transporting his brigade of four regiments and a battery of artillery by four steamers from Norfolk, Wistar arrived at Fort Yorktown. On attempting to report, he found the commanding officer, an ex-newspaper editor, incapacitated with malaria. He also noted that "the general conditions of affairs was the most disgusting I have ever seen in a military post."

Within the couple of hundred acres that were fortifications, the troops were dirty, idle and neglected. Also there were thousands of ex-slaves (also called contraband) maintained on government rations. They were idle and living under any ragged shelter amid filth, poverty, disease and death. Corruption was rampant, with a host of sutlers (government-approved sellers to military garrisons), in addition to selling food and liquor to the troops, joined petty dealers and self-styled Yankee preachers practicing every scam imaginable.

General Wistar, though subordinate to the existing commander, posted his militarily efficient brigade outside the "mess" at Yorktown. He kept his troops hard at work patrolling, drilling, and picketing. He refused any mixing or interference from other troops, sutlers, or refugees. At the same time, he requested that he and his unit be transferred to the Army of the Potomac in northern Virginia. The inept, incapacitated previous commander was relieved of his post and recalled to some obscure duty in Washington, D.C.

After quickly restoring military order, Wistar turned his attention to Fort Yorktown. As one of the initial steps taken to clear out the fortifications and port facilities, a large area of the old battlefield was surveyed and laid out to build cabins and provide a place for the refugees in the District.



Photo of Slabtown home
(Rob Ostermaier/Daily Press)

A sawmill was requisitioned and, with the help of some soldiers, the refugees soon built a town. The soldiers called it Slabtown. Just as important as providing decent shelter was the necessity of dealing with the greedy "rogues" that had been preying on the hapless refugees. With the assistance of the provost marshal, the new community organized its own police force, controlled access and expelled the 'parasites.'

During the same period, the Shiloh Baptist Church was organized and located nearby. A Freedman's Seminary also opened and addressed educational needs. After having endured such indignities as being tied to trees to force marriage for a fee of 25 cents to \$5 by a "northern missionary," the new church was welcomed and provided for religious needs of the new community. Shiloh Baptist is located today at Route 17 and Goosley Road.

Though the National Park Service reacquired the last of the town by the mid-1970s, residents and descendants have been and are leaders and mainstays of the larger community. The town's formal name was Uniontown, but Slabtown prevailed and will be remembered in the history of York County.

Source:
Fact Sheets of York County History



Brig. Gen. Isaac Wistar

(Courtesy of the Wistar Institute / September 23, 2011)
More than 12,000 fugitive slaves converged on Union lines in Yorktown after the Confederate retreat from the fortified town in May 1862. They lived there in wretched conditions for nearly a year before Brig Gen. Isaac Wistar of Pennsylvania, shown at center with his staff, took command of the District of Yorktown and ordered the construction of three contraband villages that provided shelter for thousands.

**President Lincoln Commissions
First African-American Army Chaplain**
by Reinold Beuer-Tajovsky



Rev. William Hunter, D.D.
Chaplain, 4th USCT Regt.

Shortly after Union Brigadier General Isaac J. Wistar assumed command of the newly designated Fort Yorktown in July 1863, he began to construct barracks for his garrisoned troops and some 50 'slab' huts for the many runaway slaves that had suddenly become his official 'contraband' responsibility. He built the village southeast of the Fort, designing one building to serve as a church and one as a schoolhouse. To better serve the spiritual needs of his new command within the Union Army's Fort Yorktown on the Virginia peninsula, and to tighten its security since the area was still in a war zone, Brigadier General Isaac J. Wistar made the unusual request to his higher command to have a chaplain assigned to him. In his initial after-action report, dated July 16, 1863, General Wistar asked : "Is there any mode of procuring a respectable post chaplain (Episcopal preferred) for service among both garrison and Negroes, who shall be under my exclusive control as distinguished from that of outside societies and associations? Can I select him from civil life and have him appointed as post or hospital chaplain for instance?"

The Negroes he referred to were the several thousand "contraband" --newly liberated slaves-- that became his charge and for whom he was constructing a 500-hut military displaced persons camp on the southeastern edge outside of the Fort.

Little did he realize that his request would cause the Department of the Army in Washington to have President Abraham Lincoln commission the first African-American chaplain and to establish Post Chaplain positions in the Union Army. Prior to that event the spiritual needs of soldiers were served by itinerant ministers from a variety of civilian denominations that followed the field units. Thus it was that on October 10, 1863, the

Reverend William H. Hunter (AME) arrived at Fort Yorktown with the newly organized 4th United States Infantry (USCI) Regiment from Maryland.

Prior to assuming his new position with the Union Army, Reverend Hunter ministered to several churches in the Washington, D.C. area shortly after receiving his Doctor of Divinity Degree from the African Methodist Episcopal School at the Wilberforce University in Ohio. At Fort Yorktown he not only attended to the spiritual needs of the post's garrison and the contraband community, but also the several USCI regiments that came to be temporarily encamped there throughout the Civil War. Reverend Hunter also taught the illiterate soldiers and the 'contraband' men, women and children of what was by then called "Uniontown" or "Slabtown" how to read and write. For the latter a special building was constructed and designated as church and school in the contraband camp.

Chaplain Hunter ended his military career at Wilmington, N.C. where he was hailed as liberator by the grateful AME churches there. He retired with distinction in the Washington, D.C. area.

In this way it appears General Wistar's wish was thus fulfilled when he was assigned both a chaplain and an 'Episcopalian' minister.

**Memories of Former Slave Richard Slaughter of Hampton
from an interview by Claude W. Anderson**

December 27, 1936

I was born January 9, 1849, on the James at a place called Epps Island, City Point. I was born a slave. How old am I! Well, there's the date. Count it up for yourself. My owner's name was Dr. Richard B. Epps. I stayed there until the city was burned down by its own troops rather than surrender to Federalist troops in 1861. I was around thirteen or fourteen years old when I came to Hampton.

I don't know much about the meanness of slavery. There was so many degrees in slavery, and I belonged to a very nice man. He never sold but one man, fur's I can remember, and that was cousin Ben. Sold him South. Yes. My master was a nice old man. He ain't living now. Dr. Epps died and his son wrote me my age. I got it upstairs in a letter now.

It happened this a-way. Hampton was already burnt when I came here. I came to Hampton in June 1862. The Yankees burned Hampton* (see note) and the fleet went up the James River. My father and mother and cousins went aboard the *Meritanza* with me. You see, my father and three or four men left in the darkness first and got aboard. The gun boats would fire on the towns and plantations and run the white folks off. After that they would carry all the colored folks back down here to Old Point and put 'em behind Union lines. I know the names of all the gunboats that came up the river. Yessir. There was the *Galena*, we called her the old cheese box, the *Delaware*, the *Yankee*, the *Meeker*, and the *Meritanza* which was the ship I was board of. That same year the *Merrimac* and *Monitor* fought off Newport News Point. No, I didn't see it. I didn't come down all the way on the gunboat. I had the measles on the *Meritanza* and was put off at Harrison's landing. When McClellan retreated from Richmond through the peninsula to Washington, I came to Hampton as a government water boy.

While I was aboard the gunboat, she captured a rebel gunboat at a place called Drury's Bluff. When I first came to Hampton, there were only barracks where the Institute is; when I returned General Armstrong had done rite smart.

I left Hampton still working as a water boy and went to Quiro Creek, Bell Plains, Va., a place near Harper's Ferry. I left the creek aboard a steamer, the *General Hooker*, and went to Alexandria, Va. Abraham Lincoln came aboard the steamer and we carried him to Mt. Vernon, George Washington's old home. What did he look like? Why, he looked more like an old preacher than anything I know. Heh! Heh! Heh! Have you ever seen any pictures of him? Well, if you seen a picture of him, you seen him. He's just like the picture.

You may think I speak very good English. Heh! Heh! Heh! Well, son I ought to, I been everywhere. No, I never went to what you would call school, except to school as a soldier. I went to Baltimore in 1864 and enlisted. I was about 17 years old then. My officers' names were Captain Joe Reed, Lieutenant Stimson and Colonel Joseph E. Perkins. I was assigned to the Nineteenth Regiment of Maryland Company B. While I was in training, they fought at Petersburg. I went to the regiment in '64 and stayed until 67. I was a cook. They taken Richmond the fifth day of April, 1865. On that day I walked up the road in Richmond.

I returned to Hampton and lived as an oysterman and fisherman for over forty years.

I have never been wounded. My clothes have been cut off me by bullets but the Lord kept them off my back, I guess.

While I was away my father died in Hampton. He waited on an officer. My mother lived in Hampton and saw me married in 1874. I bought a lot on Union Street for a hundred dollars cash.

Did slaves ever run away? Lord yes! All the time. Where I was born, there is a lots of water. Why there used to be as high as ten and twelve Dutch three-masters in the harbor at a time. I used to catch little snakes and other things like terrapins and sell 'em to the sailors for to eat roaches on the ships. In those days a good captain would hide a slave way up in the top sail and carry him out of Virginia to New York and Boston.

I'm a little hard of hearing and have high blood pressure. So I have to sit most the time. Got an invitation in there now wantin' me to come to a grand reunion of Yankees and the Rebels this year, but I can't go. Getting too old. Well, goodbye, son. Glad to have you come again sometime.

* The city was burned down by its own troops in 1861 rather than surrender to Federalist troops.

Source

Virginia Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Virginia from Interviews with Former Slaves, prepared by The Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938

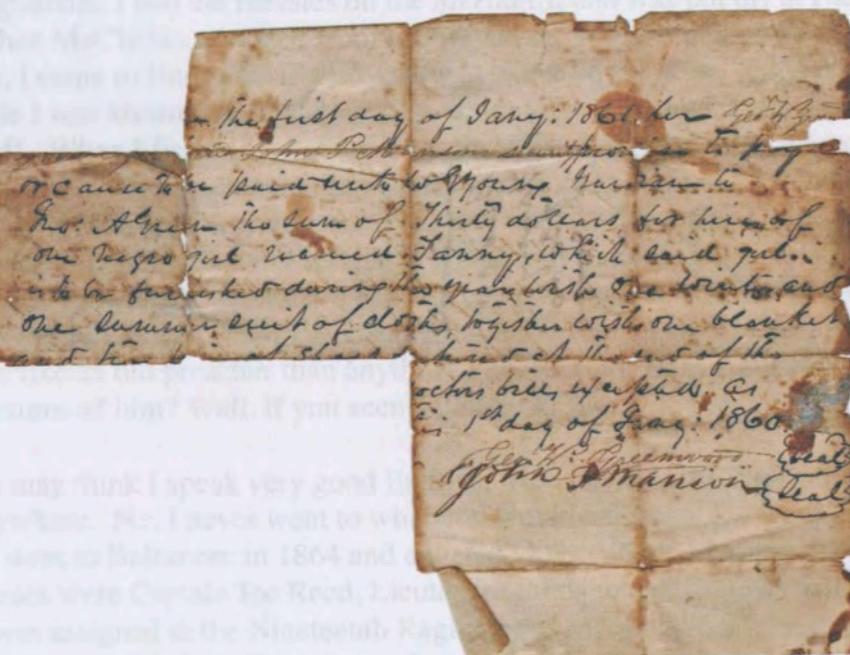
Slavery in Tabb
By Robert Emerson

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

-Thirteenth Amendment

My nephew, Carol Emerson, handed me an envelope and said, "I am entrusting this to your keeping." I suspected that the envelope contained a very old document because, in previous conversations, we had used the phrase "entrusted to your keeping" in reference to ownership of things of historical significance. When I opened the envelope, the first things I saw were the date "1861" and the word "Yorktown." I knew I was holding documentary evidence of York County's historic past.

The single page was tattered, torn into three pieces, and yellowed with age. The faded handwriting was nearly illegible.



I placed the pieces together and began deciphering the contents:

The first day of Jany, 1861 by Geo. W. Greenwood

and John P. Manson security promise to pay or cause to be paid unto whom own guardian to _____ the sum of Thirty dollars for hire of one Negro girl named Fanny which said girl is to be furnished during the year with one winter and one summer suit of clothes together with one blanket and _____ of shoes hired at the first of the _____ bill accepted as _____ this 1st day of Jany: 1860

Geo. W. Greenwood
John P Manson

After deciphering the writing, I began meditating about the contents. Only then did I fully realize the document was a slave transaction, not the sale of a human being but the renting of a slave. The realization struck me that these were real people: Fanny, George Greenwood, and John Manson were not fictitious characters from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Gone with the Wind*. Just as emphatic was the realization that this slave transaction happened right here in York County, in all probability in the Tabb area because my nephew was the great great grandson of Alex and Tavey Tabb and had received the document from his maternal grandmother, Roselyn Tabb Hudgins.

As I meditated, the people in the document became alive, especially Fanny. Surely this was a traumatic experience for her. Was she torn from her family? Would the one suit of winter clothes and the one blanket keep her warm during the damp Virginia winter? Did the cessation of the Civil War bring her freedom? What happened to Fanny?

I checked York County records and found that on November 16, 1857, Matthew Barney Smith, guardian of Alexander Tabb, bought property from Thomas R. Dunn which included a "negro slave named Fanny aged about 50." (Deed, Order and Will Book 16, p.186) Other records show business transactions between the Smith family and George Greenwood (Deed Book 17, p.137). The 1860 census records list both John Manson and George Greenwood as residents of Tabb, with Manson listed next to Matthew B. Smith. Therefore, it may be assumed that the Fanny in the document is the person in the Smith/Dunn transaction.

Although nothing was found about Fanny's fate, this limited search expanded my curiosity about slavery in York County, and I was astounding by the extent of human bondage in our county. The stereotype of slavery being predominantly located on the large plantations in the Deep South and far from our heritage is false.

During the eighteenth century, 40 percent of Virginia's population were slaves, and York County had even a higher concentration of servitude. The following chart shows the extensiveness of this "peculiar institution" in York County. Note that from 1790 to 1820 there were more slaves in York than free people. Also note that the percentage in York was always higher than that of Virginia.

SLAVE POPULATION IN YORK BASED ON U.S. CENSUS RECORDS

| Date | York/Virginia | total population | slave population | % slaves |
|------|---------------|------------------|------------------|----------|
| 1790 | York | 5,233 | 2,760 | 53.7% |

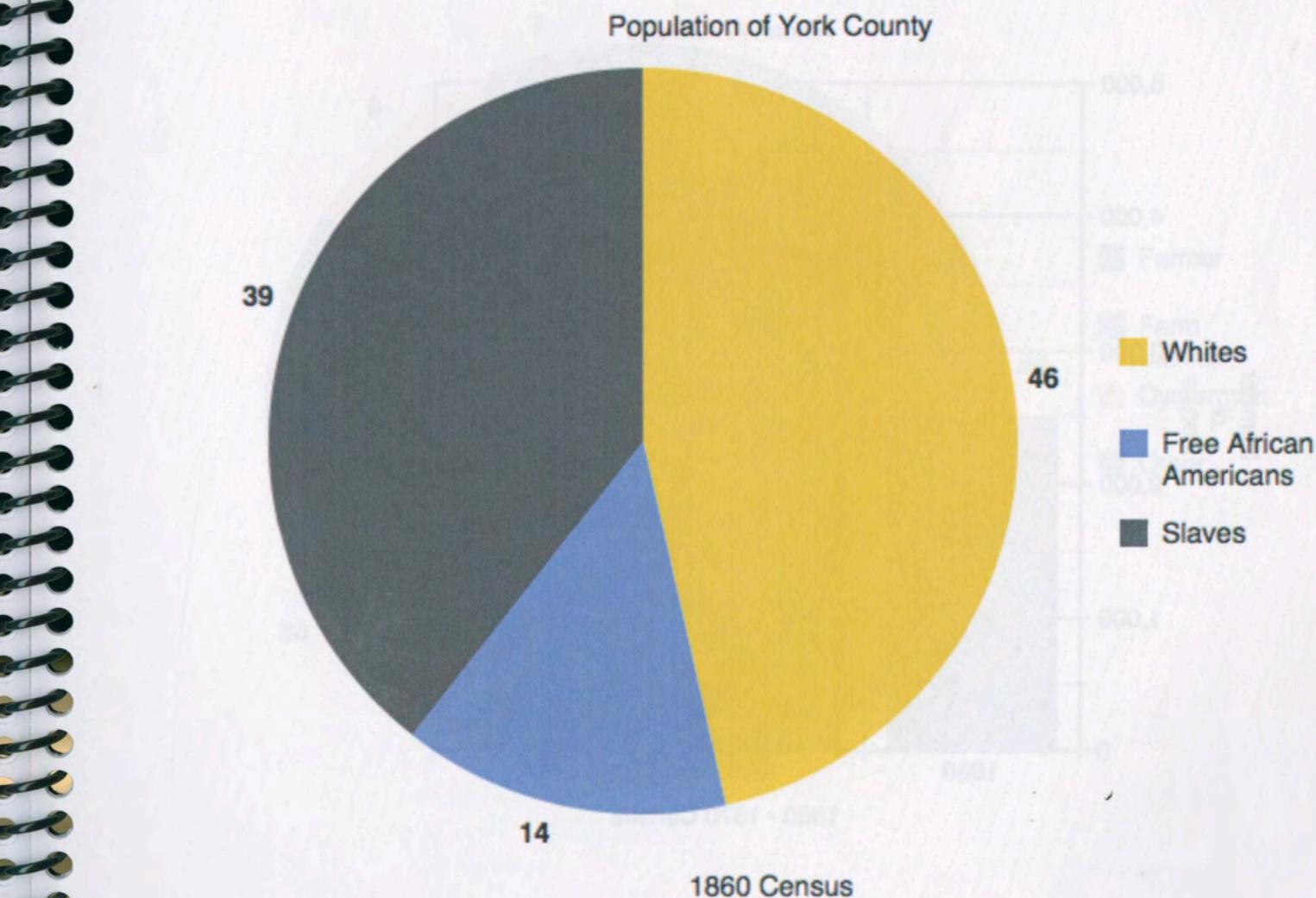
| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Virginia | 747,550 | 292,627 | 39.1% |
| 1800 York | 3,231 | 2,020 | 62.5% |
| Virginia | 885,171 | 346,671 | 39.1% |
| 1810 York | 5,187 | 2,931 | 56.5% |
| Virginia | 974,622 | 392,518 | 40.3% |
| 1820 York | 4,384 | 2,165 | 49.4% |
| Virginia | 1,065,379 | 425,153 | 39.9% |
| 1830 York | 5,354 | 2,598 | 48.5% |
| Virginia | 1,211,405 | 469,757 | 38.7% |
| 1840 York | 4,720 | 2,112 | 44.7% |
| Virginia | 1,239,797 | 449,087 | 36.2% |
| 1850 York | 4,460 | 2,181 | 48.9% |
| Virginia | 1,421,661 | 472,528 | 33.2% |
| 1860 York | 4,949 | 1,925 | 38.9% |
| Virginia | 1,596,318 | 490,865 | 30.7% |

York County courthouse records verify the extensiveness of slavery and remind us that the numbers reflect real people. At the core of this inhumane element of our heritage is man's treating his fellow human beings as commodities. County records are rampant with last will and testaments that list human beings, called by name, as property along with cows, horses, pigs, and furniture. Out of respect for the persons involved, I limit the citations to one example:

The Roberts Estate, Wills and Administration Book 3A, 1831-1858, p. 46:
 Woman Violet & child \$500
 Boy Randolph \$400
 Jacob \$400
 Edward \$150
 1 mahogany dinning table \$6
 (the list continues)

Civil War and Changes in Population

In 1860 there were 140 free African-American families in York County. Of these, 19 owned the land they farmed, and 49 others are recorded as having owned valuable personal property such as boats, livestock and tools. Most free blacks worked where they could as skilled and unskilled laborers, but subsisted mainly by farming. Squatting on unclaimed land, granted plots by sympathetic whites, or rarely, purchasing small tracts themselves, free blacks established homesteads, often in small communities with other freed slaves.

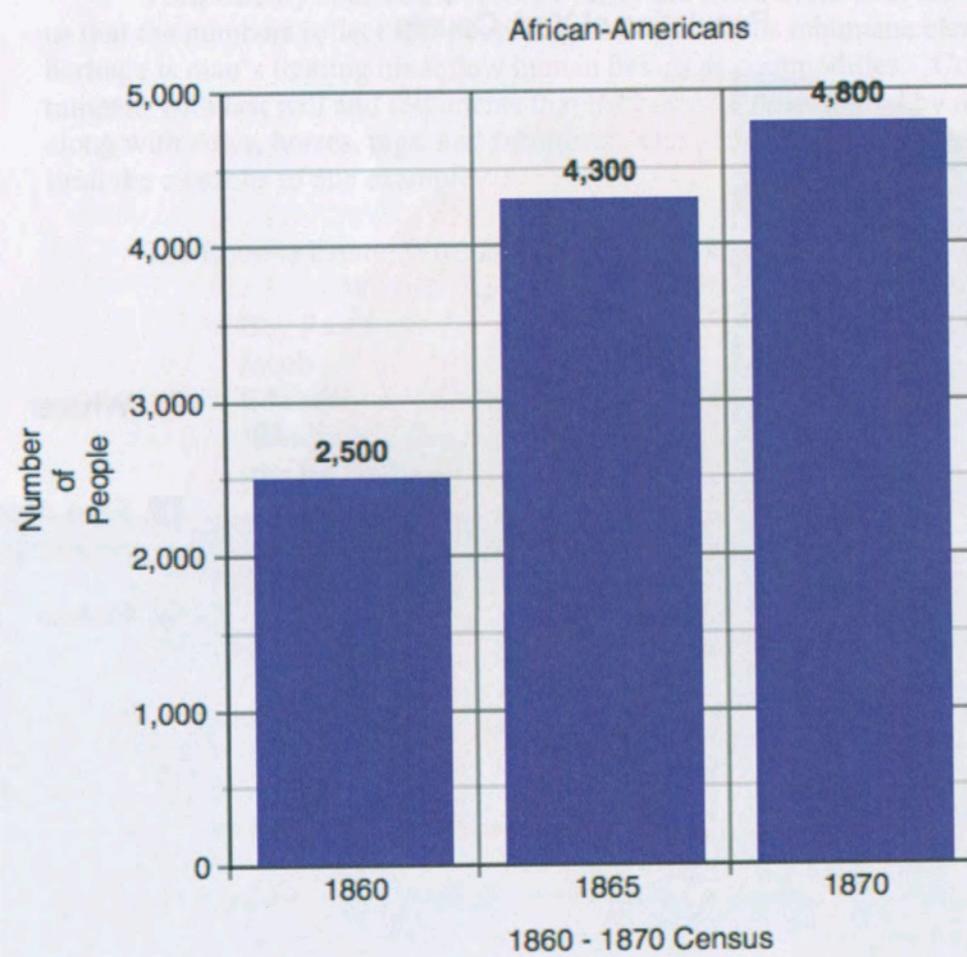


Early in April 1862, McClellan amassed over 100,000 men at Fort Monroe. McClellan's first objective in the campaign was to lay siege to Yorktown. One month later, Union forces marched into Yorktown as Confederate forces retreated towards Richmond.

As the Union Army passed through the area, it confiscated all property, including slaves. Thus, most slaves in the region were freed at least a year before the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

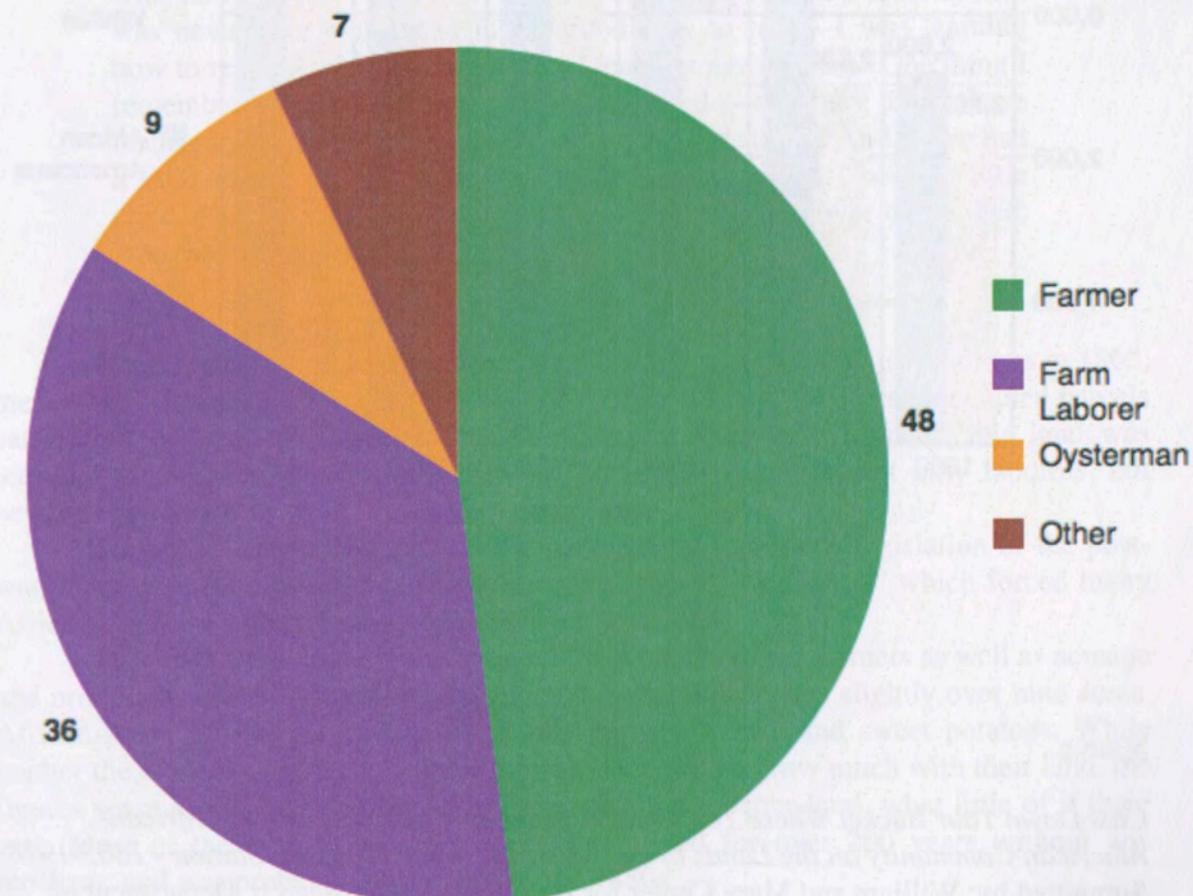
During the course of the Civil War, about 70,000 freedmen gathered on the lower Peninsula of Virginia. Many of these freedmen settled near the village of Yorktown, where General Isaac Wistar and his troops laid out a village of cabins for the freedmen called Slabtown.

The following graph, based on the census of 1860 - 1870 shows the increase in the African-American population in York County due to the war.

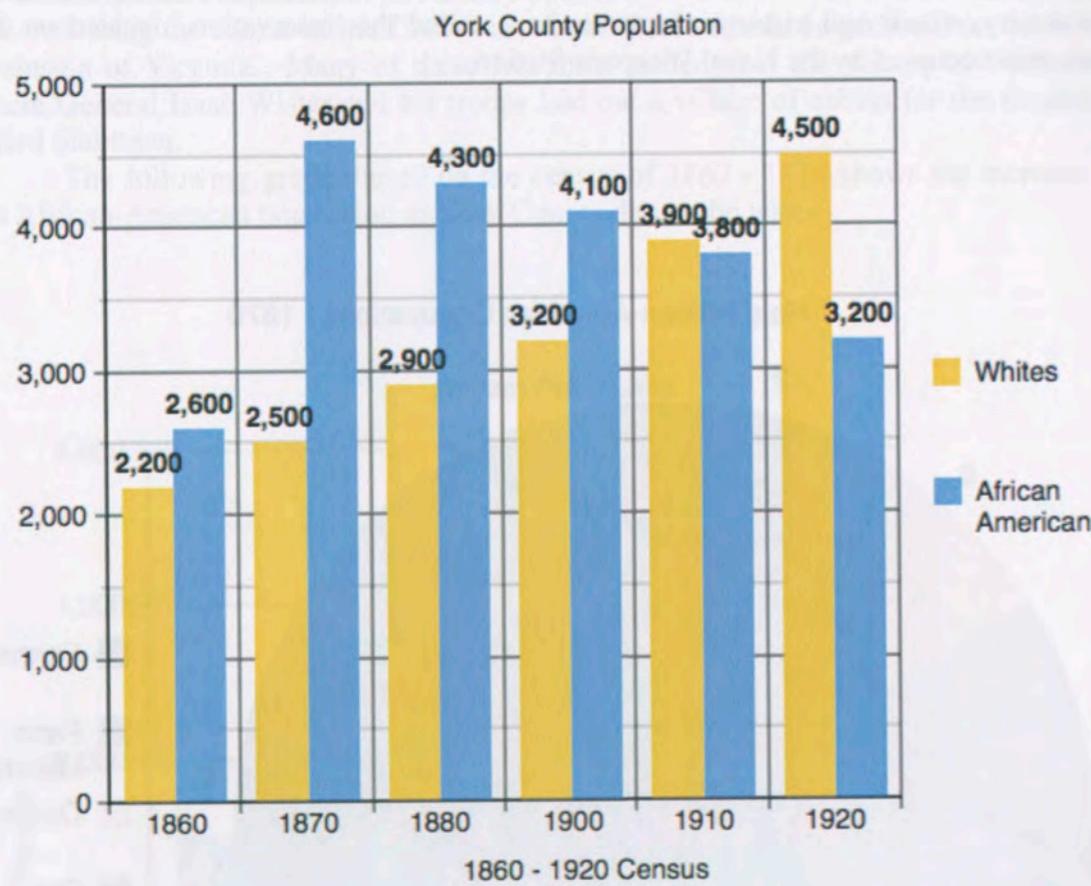


At the war's end in 1865 ex-slaves found themselves free, but with few resources to begin a new life. Only seven percent of the 4,283 free African-Americans in York County at that date were government dependents, and most of these lived at Newtown, a government camp established in the eastern end of the county. The remainder of the African-Americans in York County were self-sufficient, some settling at Slabtown, while others may have been farming the lands of captured plantations such as Tinsley Farm, Bellfield and Indian Fields. These farms formed the nucleus of the African-American community, which oral history informants have called the 'reservation,' located on the lands now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station.

Male African-American Occupations - 1870



The 1870 census recorded 4,690 African-Americans, who represented the majority of the population of the County until 1910. By 1880, however, African-Americans began to leave York County, and by 1890, the population of African-Americans had decreased to 4,395 people.



Source

Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are: An Ethnohistorical Study of the African-American Community on the Lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station - 1865-1918
 Submitted by: William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, Department of Anthropology
 Principal Investigators: Kathleen J. Bragdon, Dennis B. Blanton, Donald W. Linebaugh
 Authors: Bradley M. McDonald, Kenneth E. Stuck, Kathleen J. Bragdon

The Reservation: A Nineteenth Century African-American Community on the Lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station

Prior to the Civil War, some free African-Americans settled on land now occupied by the Naval Weapons Station. This free black settlement may have been the foundation of the post-war community known as the 'Reservation.' In an interview with Kathleen Bragdon in 1987, Mrs. Fannie Epps remembered visiting her great-grandparents who lived there, offering a fascinating glimpse into the daily lives of free blacks as they may have lived in the early decades of the 19th century. Mrs. Epps described her great-grandparent's cabin which was in York County.

"Well, it was a log cabin...log house, I guess you could call it a cabin...cause it had one big room with a big fireplace. And the walls were of clay..because they used to paper them, not with wall paper but with newspaper. And when I was a child--the reason I remember it was newspaper was I had just learned how to read---I was learning how to read. And I'd go around and read the newspapers. One thing I remember too, about it was that it had a bed----and they didn't have mattresses like we have now. It was a quilted mattress. And so we had a little stool and the bed was up high like this. And I being a little child, I had to step up on the stool. And then I'd fall over on the bed. And the bed was made of feathers."

While a number of African Americans in York County were land holders in 1865, the land-owning status of others was less clear. 'Reservation' residents occupied parcels carved out of large plantations confiscated during the war. Some of this land was returned to its owners, and many African-Americans were left not only landless, but bereft of livelihood as well.

Adding to their problems was the increasingly repressive legislation of the post-war years, particularly the set of laws known as the 'Black Codes,' which forced many African-Americans into exploitative wage labor situations.

The 1880 Agricultural Census listed the products of the farmers as well as acreage and production value. The average African-American farm was slightly over nine acres. African-American farmers produced mainly corn, and Irish and sweet potatoes. While neither the African-Americans nor the whites were able to grow much with their land, the figures seem to indicate that the white farmers had the better land, what little of it there was. Most of the land in the area had been farmed for over 200 years without any fertilizer, and was probably farmed out by the 1880s.

In 1991 some of the former residents of 'the Reservation' were interviewed for a study by the Department of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary. The following are some of the descriptions of their way of life.

Mrs. Fannie Epps remembers her parents, who lived in Williamsburg, traveling out to the 'Reservation' with town supplies such as coffee, flour and sugar, to exchange

them there for eggs, butter and fresh vegetables. Mrs. Alice Roache recalled her daily routine as a child:

"You came home from school, you shelled corn for the chickens, you did your chores. You brought in the wood, the kindling, the chips, whatever. You did all this before you had supper ---gathered up the wood. And then after supper, you did your homework and you went to bed."

In spite of these efforts, many families could not survive on the produce of their farms alone, and many supplemented their diets and incomes by oystering. Mr. Alexander Lee, who was born in 1914 to John and Martha Lee, lived on Felgate's Creek. Alexander's father had 66 acres of land and 60 fruit trees. But according to Lee, his main occupation was oystering.

"My father was an oysterer, he dealt with oysters, you see. He worked at the James River in the wintertime, at oyster season, he planted oysters...he had his own boat; his and his brothers had their own business...and majority of the people in the area were farmers and...worked the river...oysters and fishing."

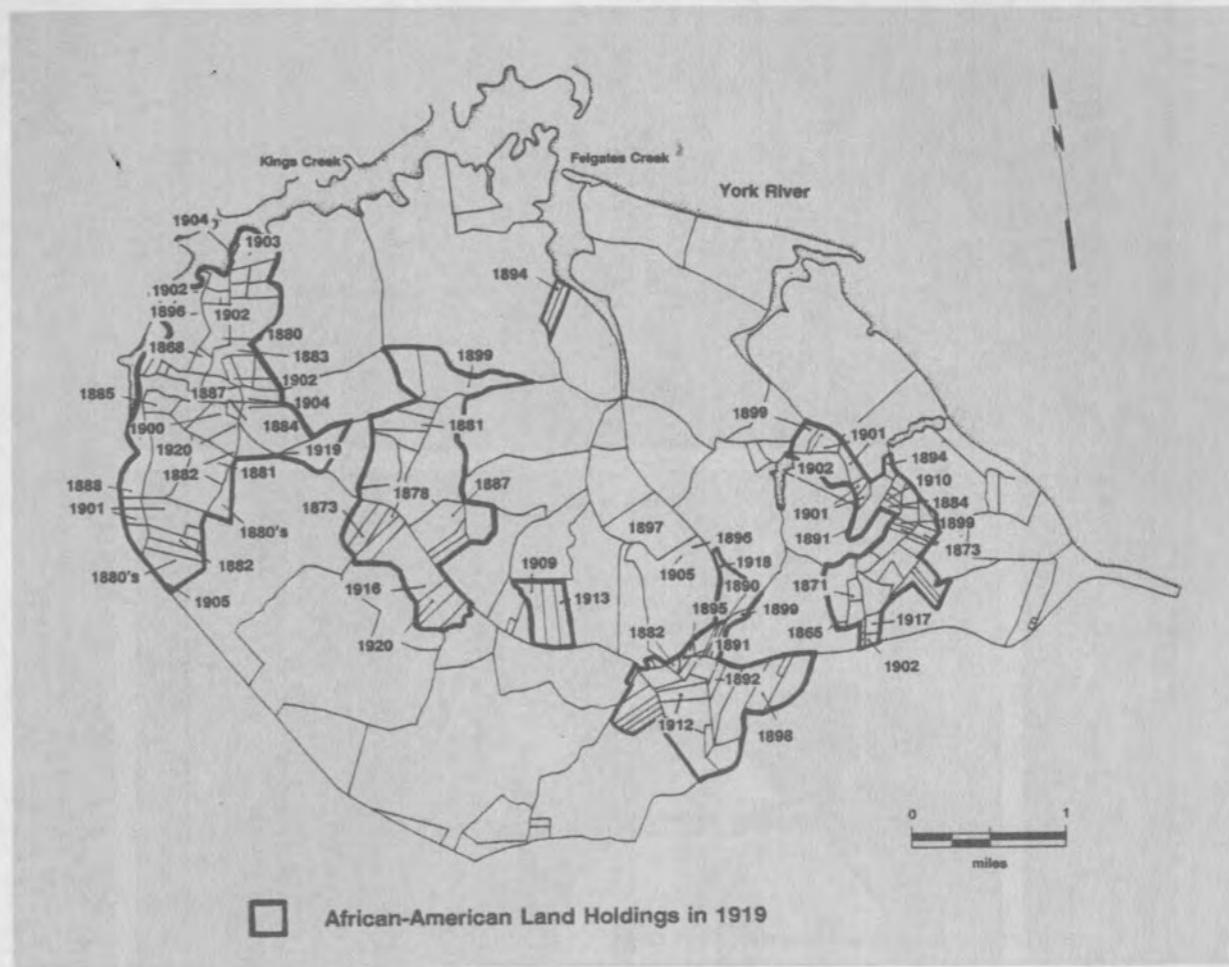
Although primarily producers, African Americans on the 'Reservation' were also consumers. Most shopped at white-owned stores which operated in the area, such as the store at Halstead's Point run by Mr. Knight and J. Clements. Clothing - or more often cloth, - furniture, and household goods and building supplies were purchased there, along with other items which made life more comfortable. Some residents had well-constructed frame houses.

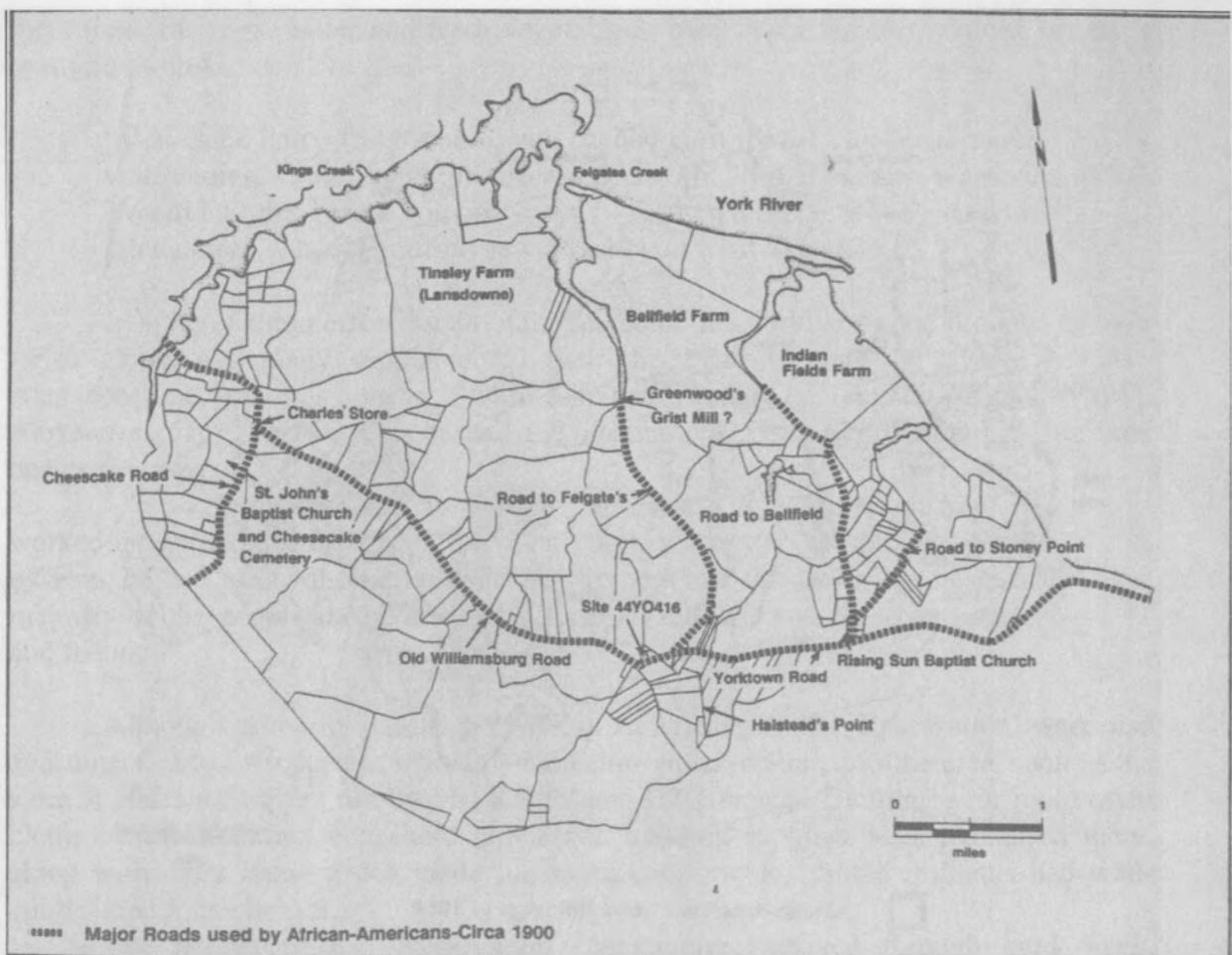
The people of the 'Reservation' community survived through hard work, versatility, and a sense of loyalty to one another. Alexander Lee recalled:

"The problem was that people had a lot of land, but no money. I praise my great grandfather, grandfather, and father because they came out of slavery with no knowledge of nothing, but with wisdom and foresight, they planned things. They had to pitch in and do it themselves."

This remembrance of Mr. James H. Payne is typical of recollections of the African-American community in the years just before the establishment of the Naval Weapons Station:

"Black families still lived on isolated farmsteads or in small clusters of houses near roads or creeks. The white population was small and scattered...just a few white families...in the area around Felgate's Creek. Most of the white people lived in the place called Halstead's Point, which is the area now located just inside of the main gate of the Weapons Station today."





"versatility, and a sense of community consciousness, is something we've neglected."

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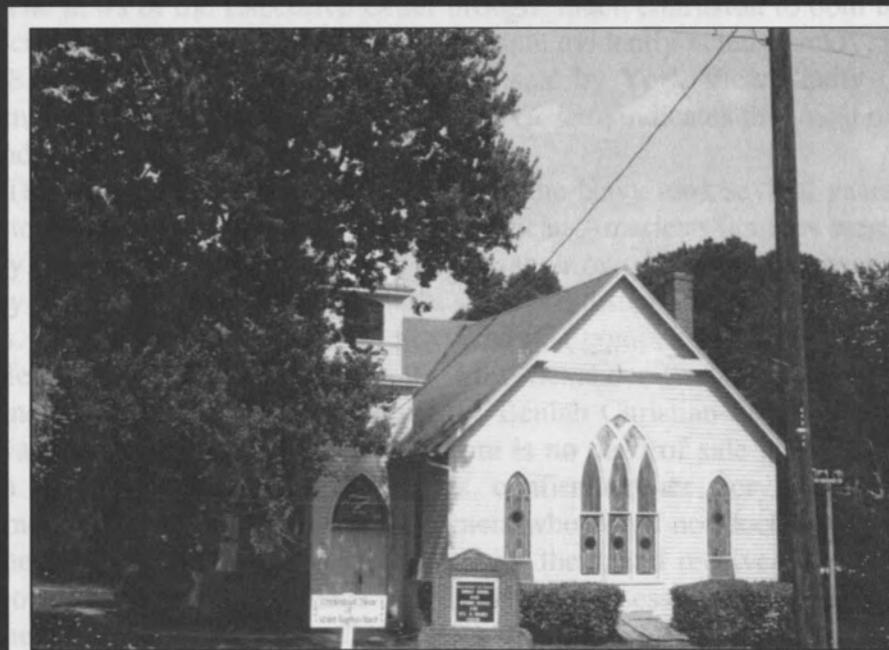
Black families still lived on unfenced farmsteads in small clusters of houses. *Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are: An Ethnohistorical Study of the African-American Community on the Lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station - 1865-1918*

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York County History: Essays and Memories

African-American History The 20th Century



The earlier Shiloh Baptist Church at the corner of Cook and Goosley Rds.

Creation of the Naval Weapons Station

On July 1, 1918, the U.S Congress passed a bill that financed the Naval Service for the next year. As part of that bill, Congress gave President Woodrow Wilson the power to immediately seize land for the expansion of seven existing bases and for the creation of a Navy Mine Depot. On August 7, 1918, President Wilson exercised this power and seized an area of 11,433 acres by eminent domain in a document known as Executive Order #1472. The President ordered everyone who owned land within the boundaries of the new Mine Depot to abandon such land within 30 days; just compensation to be worked out later.

The news of the Executive Order brought much confusion to both the whites and the African-Americans in the community. Some evidently acted quickly, for on August 29, 1918, the *Virginia Gazette* reported the sale by York View Realty of land to the Government. An April 10, 1919, article in the *Gazette* indicates that most of the residents did abandon their land as ordered.

The actual consolidation of the land by the Navy took several years to complete. Oral histories indicate that as many as 600 African-American families were displaced by the Navy, and many of these were said to own their own land. Monetary amounts paid by the Navy for the people's land was also a source of disappointment, according to the oral histories. The Executive Order had promised just compensation for the land, but most people felt that they did not receive it. Mr. Alexander Lee remembers that his father complained of not being paid enough. Mrs. Beulah Christian Scott remembers that her father was not even paid for his land. There is no deed of sale in Mrs. Scott's father's name in the York County Deed Records, confirming her story. It appears that the Government did not compensate those owners who could not document their title to the land. Those people who were compensated for their land received about five times the amount of its assessed value. Since their lands were assessed at low values, however, the price they received did not allow them to buy equivalent amounts of land in Williamsburg, Yorktown, Grove or Lackey.

Smaller acreage made subsistence farming more difficult, and fewer blacks could rely on oystering, since access to many of the oyster grounds was cut off after the Weapons Station was established. In addition to concerns about livelihood, many former residents of the "Reservation" expressed unhappiness at having to leave their hard-won homesteads. No amount of money could be considered 'just compensation' for such a loss.

Mrs. Alice Roache recalled the construction of new houses and the reestablishment of a close-knit community.

"When the people came out of the Weapons Station, or the Naval Mine Depot, as it was then, they made houses. They were sturdy houses, they weren't log cabins, they were frame buildings, and they had porches, and flowers -- they made it good...You had a well. A lot of people had horses, you know, to do the farming with. Some had cows, and those people that had cows sold milk to those that didn't have it. And everybody raised a garden. You raised hogs - and your close friends - when one person would kill, they would send a certain portion of meat to all of their friends. When the next person killed,

then they would send fresh - they called it 'fresh' - they would send it to all of their friends."

African-American children were sent to elementary schools in Lackey and Williamsburg, and to high school in Yorktown, Hampton, Petersburg or Richmond. Families worked hard to support one another and placed heavy emphasis on education. This community pride survives today in the areas where the refugees of 1919 settled: Lackey, Grove, Lee Hall. The African-American community once known as the 'Reservation' has scattered and reformed, but its spirit lives on in the new communities created by its descendants.

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The McNorton Family of Yorktown

by Lois Winter



DANIEL M. NORTON
Senate
York

A lovely large Victorian house in the heart of Yorktown symbolizes the achievements of a highly successful black family. The home had been owned by Dr. Daniel McNorton, the first of his family in Yorktown.



Dr. McNorton learned his medical trade after escaping from slavery to Troy, N.Y. in 1860. He was born in Williamsburg, reared in Gloucester County, studied medicine in Troy, returned to his native state in 1864, and by 1866 was living in Yorktown. He was elected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of Virginia, 1877-1887. He served for forty years as a physician for both races, amassed a considerable property in and around Yorktown, and died highly respected by his fellow citizens.

The following is Dr. Daniel McNorton's obituary from *The Zanesville Times Recorder*, Zanesville, Ohio, 1918:

"The death of Dr. Daniel McNorton, aged 72, one of the best known colored men in this country, and a son-in-law of the late N.T. Gant, occurred in a hospital in Hampton Roads, Va. at 1:30 o'clock Friday afternoon following an illness of Bright's disease. The body was shipped to this city (Zanesville, Ohio) arriving here Wednesday morning and was taken to the Mader morgue. The funeral will be conducted at the grave in Woodlawn cemetery at 11 o'clock Thursday morning by the Rev. A.M. Thomas of the Union Baptist Church.

Dr. McNorton was a native of Williamsburg, Virginia, but the for past several years had made his home in Yorktown. For many years he was a prominent physician of that place until he retired from his profession. For 16 years he was a member of the Virginia state legislature and for many years was internal revenue collector at Newport News, Va. He was well-known in this city where he had frequently visited and was a man of sterling character and was highly educated having attended many prominent universities in the south.

Dr. McNorton is survived by his widow and two children, Nelson McNorton of the home and Mrs. Anna Brooks of Norfolk, Va. who accompanied the remains to this city."

Dr. Daniel McNorton's son, Nelson F. McNorton, followed in his father's footsteps in practicing medicine to both blacks and whites living in a racially mixed neighborhood. The Custom House, now housing the headquarters of the Comte de Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, was at one time owned by the McNortons who conducted a private school for black children there.



The following profile of Nelson Frederick McNorton, comes from *History of the American Negro and his Institutions*, published in 1921:

"In this historic old village of Yorktown resides a colored physician who has made a solid success of his profession, and who has acquired such standing that much of his practice is among white people. This is but another way of saying that character will overcome apparently insuperable obstacles.

Dr. Nelson Frederick McNorton was born in the village where he now lives on Sept. 28, 1875, son of Dr. Daniel and Sadie Gant McNorton. Dr. Daniel McNorton practiced medicine successfully in Yorktown for forty years, was a man of character, sixteen years a member of the Virginia State Senate. His wife was daughter of N.T. (Sr.) and Maria Gant, of Zanesville, Ohio. N.T. Gant Sr. was born in Leesburg, Va. from which place he moved to Zanesville.

When young McNorton came to the proper age he was sent to Zanesville, Ohio, where his mother's people lived, and spent five years in city schools, thus securing advantages not obtained in Yorktown. From there he went to the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute at Petersburg, graduating with the degree of A.B. in 1893.

Entering the Leonard Medical College of Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C., he was graduated in 1897 with the degree of M.D. In that same year he entered upon the practice of his profession at Yorktown. His father was still in the active practice, had made a fine reputation, and Dr. McNorton gratefully acknowledges that this was most helpful to him. The elder Dr. McNorton survived until 1918, so that the son had the benefit of his counsel for long years.

But the son had the medical quality as well as the father, and he has built up a reputation of his own, second to no physician in that section.

As riches count in that section he would be classed wealthy, but like most physicians who have the spirit of the work, the first consideration with him is the patient - the fee is another matter.

He is eminently a man of one work, In politics and Republican he takes no active part beyond voting. He is a member of the Baptist Church and the Masonic order. He holds membership in the Old Dominion Medical Society, the National Medical Association, the N.A.A.C.P. and the National Negro Business League; is Examiner for the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, and the Standard Life Insurance Company.

Dr. McNorton keeps up with the current literature of the day and has read practically all the race literature. His travels have been mostly in the East, West, and North of our country.

He was married December 29, 1909, to Carrie R. Phillips, daughter of Thomas and Jennie S. Phillips, of York County. Mrs. McNorton was educated at Hampton Institute and prior to her marriage was a teacher."

Dr. McNorton's widow, Carrie, died in 1972, after living a successful life in the early 20th century segregated south. Neighbor Betty McPherson remembered her as a homemaker and Red Cross volunteer. Ms. McPherson recalls that Mrs. McNorton enjoyed taking the train from Lee Hall to shop at Nachman's in downtown Newport

News while the Doctor and his son would wait at the train station for her to come back.
"Knowing her certainly enriched my life," she said.

The Zanesville News of Zanesville, Ohio published the following obituary for Dr. Nelson McNorton May 18, 1948:

"Relatives and friends in this city have received word of the death of Dr. Nelson McNorton, prominent physician of York, Virginia. Dr. McNorton was well known in this city having visited here in his later year and received his earlier education in the Zanesville schools.

His mother was Mrs. Sadie Gant McNorton, daughter of the late Nelson T. Gant. Local funeral services were held at the Shiloh Baptist Church in York and burial was in the churchyard."

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The History of James Weldon Johnson/Yorktown Middle School

by Lois Winter



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Welcome to **YORKTOWN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Pre-1910

A two-room schoolhouse served the students of Yorktown, Va. until 1915 when the red brick building on Ballard Street opened. The original two-room frame building had no electricity and received its bucket of water from the well of the Rogers home, across the street from the Courthouse. The bucket of water sat on a table in a hall between the two classrooms of the building. One room accommodated grades 1 through 6, the other grades 7 through 10.

York County Training School

In 1914, under the leadership of the late Mrs. Mary S. Washington, a movement was begun to build a schoolhouse. Dr. Jackson Davis, who was the State Supervisor of Negro Education, became interested and sought to carry out the proposed movement. He recommended Charles E. Brown, the principal of the Graded School at Charlotte Court House, Virginia. Mr. Brown came to York County in October 1914, and soon a four-room frame building was constructed and ready for use in 1915. African-American parents donated much of the labor used in the construction. An old abandoned store was converted into a domestic science room for girls. The patrons purchased an adjacent lodge hall, and converted it into a manual art shop for boys. There were five teachers.

In 1918 the U.S. Government established the Naval Mine Depot on the property on which the school was located. Until a new school building could be constructed, classes were taught at Shiloh Baptist Church. The patrons purchased 5 1/2 acres of land on Goosley Road with the \$6,000 they received from the government for the original school property. Donations of \$1,600 from the Rosenwald Fund, and \$4,300 secured through personal contributions, entertainments and solicitations, built a six-room building with an auditorium, an office and cloakrooms. It was ready for use in 1921.

Two teachers were added, making a faculty of seven. Two years of high school were provided. An abandoned one-room schoolhouse was torn down, moved to the school site and reconstructed to serve as a boys' workshop. The former domestic science course was developed into a home economics course, and the manual arts course became an agriculture course. Two more instructors were added, increasing the faculty to nine teachers who provided four years of high school work.

With \$2,000 provided by the State, \$2,000 by the County School Board and \$2,000 by the patrons, a modern home economics cottage was constructed, and under similar arrangements an agriculture shop was constructed. The reconstructed "old one-room school building" was converted into a science laboratory. With a faculty of nine well trained teachers and 320 pupils, the York County Training School was well established, and though it had not met the requirements of the State for accreditation, its graduates were accepted by such schools as Hampton Institute, Virginia State, Morgan State, and Union Theological Seminary.

During the period from 1914 to 1933, Mr. Brown remained the principal of the school and the guiding force in the school's advancement. During this same period the members of the faculty represented such schools as the University of Pennsylvania, Howard University, Virginia Union, Hampton Institute, Virginia State College, Wilberforce College, and St. Paul College.

Some of the contributing factors which did much to enhance the progress of the school were: the interest and enthusiasm of the patrons, and the interest, influence and encouragement provided by the presence of such noted persons as the late Dr. Booker T. Washington, Dr. Hollis B. Frissell, Dr. John M. Gandy, Dr. James H. Dillard, Dr. Jackson Davis, and Dr. R.C. Stearn, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

There was an interest in the need for improvement in Negro education, which was spearheaded by such organizations as the Rosenwald Fund, Jeanes Fund, General Education Board and the Slater Fund. Several acts of Congress made available finances to aid education in the South. In 1915 our school term was lengthened to eight months, and the patrons donated one half the amount of the salary for the four teachers. The enrollment that year was 208 representing eight grades. School work that year showed marked progress. Two years of high school work were now added and one could see rapid improvement and progress through the types of programs which were given at church and schools.

On May 31, 1954, a great catastrophe befell us. Our building burned to the ground, putting 376 pupils out of school. The Shiloh Baptist Church opened its doors to us as they had done in 1914 when the government took over the school property.

The Motley Construction Company of Farmville, Virginia, built the James Weldon Johnson School. Work was started on this building June 14, 1954. The cost was \$731,966. There were 26 classrooms, a gymnasium, an auditorium and more. The enrollment was 650 high school and elementary pupils.

There were 26 instructors. We had a 12-year curriculum, including business, agriculture, shop, home economics and the academic subjects.

Third Generation Schools

(James Weldon Johnson/Yorktown Intermediate School/Yorktown Middle School)

What is now Yorktown Middle School located on Route 17 at the corner of Goosley Road about 1/2 mile from the Coleman Bridge was originally the James Weldon Johnson School for African American students.

It was named in honor of James Weldon Johnson (June 17, 1871 - June 26, 1938). He composed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which later became regarded as the Black National Anthem. He was U.S. Consul to Venezuela, Consul to Nicaragua and later became a professor at Fisk University.

In 1954 the James Weldon Johnson School opened as a complete school with grades 1 through 12, replacing the burned down York County Training School.

When the County schools were integrated during the 1967-68 school year, the school was renamed Yorktown Intermediate School and housed grades 7 through 9. In 1972 ninth grade students were moved to York High School. At the beginning of the 1992-93 school year, the school was renamed Yorktown Middle School. Sixth grade students were taken out of the elementary schools and placed at Yorktown Middle School.

In order to remember the legacy of the James Weldon Johnson School, on August 18, 1996, the auditorium was dedicated the "James Weldon Johnson Memorial Auditorium".

Most of this excerpt appears in the booklet entitled "*A Golden Legacy - Rich and Diverse*" created for the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the James Weldon Johnson School/Yorktown Intermediate School/Yorktown Middle School held on Saturday, August 21, 2004, at Yorktown Middle School in Yorktown, Va.

this body gathered at a nearby hotel, denied entry to the Central Auditorium and had to leave by another entrance. This was the first time that African Americans had been denied entrance to a public performance since the days of slavery.



NAACP, Grafton, Va - 1949

Back: Walter Jones, Cignor Bradley, Rev. F.E. Segar, Deacon Edney, Rev. Samuel, L Massey, Rev. Lieutenant Reed, Rev. M.R. Banks

Middle: ?, Mrs. Beulah Wallace, Mrs. Alberta Norton, Mrs. Mary Watkins

Front: McKinley Whiting, Charles Brown, Bessie Jackson

Shiloh Baptist Church

by Mark St. John Erickson



When the crowds came to Surrender Field for the 150th anniversary of the American victory at Yorktown in 1931, what they saw was an immense expanse of tents and an enormous grandstand. Lost in all the patriotic hoopla was the historic black church and neighborhood that stood nearby, their own story of determination and independence hidden by the trees that lined the main road.

Founded by slaves in 1863, Shiloh Baptist Church and the African-American quarter originally known as Slabtown had not only survived the tumult of the Civil War but gone on to become a center of political and social change during Reconstruction. They continued that tradition during the darkest days of discrimination in the early 1900s, then led the fight to desegregate a half-century later.

Few members of the congregation imagined how important their old church would become in the 1970s, however, when the neighborhood was dismantled to restore a key part of the historic battlefield. Yet since that daunting upheaval, Shiloh and its close-knit flock — many of whom can trace their ties back many generations — have not only persisted but flourished.

"Many of the families here go back to Slabtown and the original church," says Cassie Phillips, who, along with her husband, Winston, heads the church's ministry for African-American affairs. "And when you have people who can say my mother was here, my father was here — my grandparents and great-grandparents, too — you have a special history. Even after the old church came down and the neighborhood moved across the highway, they continued to worship here. And that's because this church has always been our anchor."

Little is known about Shiloh's founding pastor, a former Yorktown slave named John Carey, who joined with other refugee blacks to build a simple log and board-clad church on the outskirts of Slabtown. But there's doubt about the influence of Carey's chief ally — Rev. Jeremiah Asher — whose noted African-American church in Philadelphia gave its name to the fledgling mission.



Rev. Jeremiah Asher of Shiloh Baptist Church
(Rob Ostermaier/Daily Press)

The Connecticut-born grandson of a Revolutionary War veteran, Asher was a well-known opponent of slavery, especially after staging a high-profile vigil for abolitionist John Brown on the day of his execution. He also pressed for enlisting black troops in the Union cause, including two Pennsylvania regiments that served in Yorktown after Confederate defenders abandoned it in May 1862.

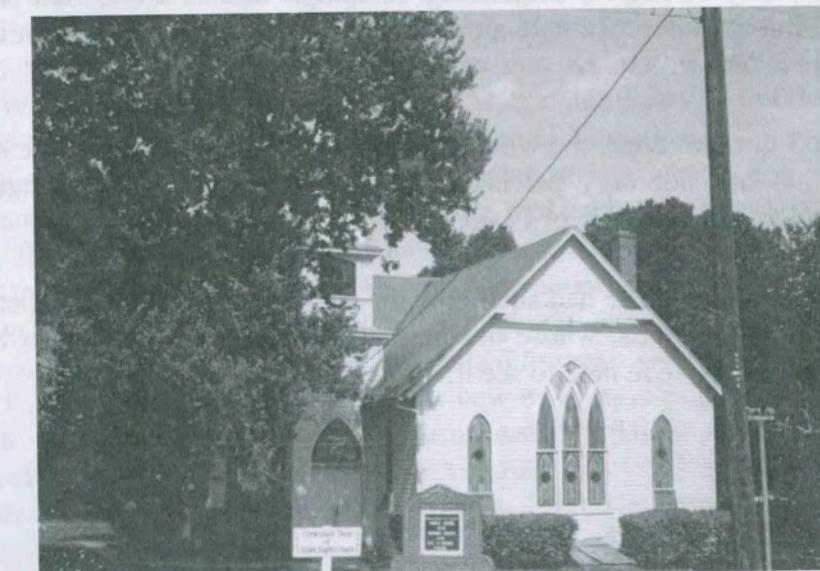
Intent on ministering to those soldiers and thousands of refugee slaves, Asher traveled South in 1863 and soon decided to enlist in the 6th U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment. But before leaving in May 1864, he joined Carey and other residents of the carefully laid-out, self-policed black town to found a church where African-Americans could decide for themselves how to worship.

"Asher was an extraordinary figure," says Colonial National Historical Park's Diane K. Depew, whose research has shed new light on the "nice, neat, tidy" town of slab-built cabins. "He came here for humanitarian purposes — then enlisted in the 6th USCT. And every single white officer in the regiment supported his appointment as the unit's chaplain."

After Asher left, Shiloh soldiered on, supported by such powerful figures as trustee Daniel Norton. Born a slave near Williamsburg in 1840, Norton fled with his brother to New York, where he studied medicine. He returned to Yorktown in 1865 and quickly became Slabtown's chief spokesman. Elected to the local Freedmen's Bureau court, Norton soon ran afoul of bureau commissioner Samuel Chapman Armstrong — the future founder of Hampton University — who believed giving an African-American such an influential post was too radical.

Within two years, however, the undaunted Norton — who founded a secret black political group known as the Lone Star Society — was representing York and James City Counties at the state constitutional convention. He later served 13 years in the state senate, where — despite his frequent criticism of Armstrong — he helped secure the land grant that made Hampton University independent.

"The Nortons did command the black majorities in their counties," writes historian Robert Engs in his landmark study of African-Americans on the Peninsula after the Civil War. "And white Republicans found it expedient to acknowledge that fact."



The earlier Shiloh Baptist Church
at the corner of Cook and Goosley Rds.

Inside his church, the well-to-do doctor was a mover and shaker, too, leading its relocation to a new site across from the National Cemetery in 1893. When that church burned in 1897, he stepped up again, resulting in a stately sanctuary that cost a then-staggering \$9,000.

Like many black churches across the South, Shiloh's influence waned when the relatively progressive policies of the Reconstruction years gave way to the institutionalized prejudice of the Jim Crow era. But it still boasted such prominent figures as educator Charles E. Brown, who became president of the state NAACP as well as a tireless advocate for York County's black schools. Even 35 years after his death, his example can still be felt in the public park that bears his name and the stained-glass windows he dedicated to his church.

"Old Shiloh was a church of great influence," Deacon Mark Giles says. "When you talked about it, you were talking about the upper echelon of the people who lived here."

Still, no change threatened that legacy more than the upheaval that took place when the federal government dismantled the neighborhood and its church in the 1970s for a battlefield preservation campaign. More than 3 dozen families had to move from their old homes in the community that had been rechristened Uniontown, and — despite the Park Service's success in spurring a nearby development where many residents resettled — the change was traumatic.

"It was not an easy thing to be uprooted," says lifelong church member Annie Lofton, describing her father's loss of his fruit trees, chickens and hunting dogs. "And even if you were lucky enough to move into a place next to your old neighbors, you could no longer just go out the front door and walk to church."

Raising money for the new church posed another challenge, one that the congregation met partly through a demanding campaign of fish fries, bake sales and spaghetti dinners. But as trustee Ralph Carr recalls, no one backed down from investing in a bigger, newer modern structure.

More than 3 decades later, the wisdom of that \$175,000 gambit can be seen in a bustling church that has not only persisted but prospered. Just 5 years ago Shiloh expanded again under the leadership of Pastor Barbara Lemon.

"In the last 10 years we've had such growth. It's like nothing we've experienced," says church Mother Ethel Curtis, whose ties here go back generations. "After all we've been through, I'm just glad we're here to see it."

Grafton Baptist Church

1860 - 2010

by Mrs. Olivia B. Wilcher



Located at the intersection of Old York-Hampton Highway and Hornsbyville Road, Grafton Baptist Church has been a meeting place for a body of Christian worshippers for 150 years. This church had its beginning in 1860 when John Steadman, a white man, gave two acres of land on which a building of worship was erected and used by black and white people of the Baptist faith. A small slab building was erected and used alternately by the two races until some dissatisfaction arose between the two groups. The white members sold their interest to the black members and moved to Tampico, now Hornsbyville. The black people continued to worship in the slab building until 1889. In that year it was torn down and replaced by a straight-up-and-down board structure. The membership increased under the leadership of the first recorded ordained pastor, the Reverend Mr. Thomas Knapper. After Reverend Knapper's death, the Reverend Mr. Thomas Wright of Denbigh became pastor. After many years of faithful service, he was succeeded by the Reverend Mr. Charles A. Green of Yorktown.

During Reverend Green's thirty-five year administration, the church progressed rapidly, and a modern weatherboard structure replaced the straight-up-and-down board building. Each year the membership increased and Grafton became one of the leading churches in the Tidewater Peninsula Baptist Association.

On Sunday, December 7, 1987, the final service was held in the aforementioned structure, and later the building was demolished to make way for the present edifice. On March 11, 1988, the concrete slab for the new building was poured. The Reverend Mr. George R. Ghelson, who had served first as assistant pastor and then as interim pastor was selected as pastor on Monday, November 19, 1990 and installed on Sunday, December 23, 1990. On Sunday, November 14, 1999, Reverend Ghelson and the church

members held the ground-breaking ceremony for a new addition that included a two-story section with classrooms and a fellowship hall.

In 1997, Grafton Baptist Church of Harris Grove celebrated a reunion with two other churches bearing the name 'Grafton'. One, Grafton Baptist Church in Dare seemed to have grown out the the group that went to Tampico when the blacks and whites spilt in the 1860s. The tie to New Grafton Baptist Church in Newport News is definite. New Grafton's organizer, the Reverend Mr. Silas Corsey, had been a member of this church and he named his new church in honor of, and respect for, his home church.

What did John Steadman envision when in 1860, he gave two acres of land on which a building of worship was erected and used by black and white people of the Baptist faith? I'm sure Mr. Steadman would be pleased that his was a gift that has kept on giving.

The original church present today is the same one built in 1860, having moved from their old homes in the countryside that had been rechristened Uniontown, and — despite the Park Service's concern in sparing a nearby development where many residents

had been evicted — to build a church for those who were still there. The new church is a simple, single-story wooden building, turned inward to the rear, so that the interior could be easily converted to a schoolroom if needed. It is a simple structure, with a single entrance on the side facing the street. A small porch extends from the front door, supported by four simple wooden posts. The interior is simple, with a single wooden pulpit at the front, and a single wooden bench for the pastor. The pews are simple wooden benches, arranged in rows facing the pulpit. The ceiling is made of simple wooden beams, and the floor is made of simple wooden planks. The walls are made of simple wooden panels, and the windows are simple wooden frames. The overall impression is one of simplicity and functionality.

More than 3 decades later, the church is still standing, though it has undergone some changes. The exterior has been repainted, and the interior has been updated. The pews have been replaced by more comfortable chairs, and the pulpit has been replaced by a more modern one. The overall impression is one of a well-maintained and active place of worship.

"In the last 10 years we've made a lot of improvements to the building," says Mr. Corsey. "We've added a new roof, new siding, and new windows. We've also added a new entrance on the side, and we've updated the interior. The pews are more comfortable now, and the pulpit is more modern. We've also added a new organ and a new piano. The church is still a active place of worship, and we're always looking for ways to improve it further."

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